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The Influence of Prison Skills Programming on the Reentry Process

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Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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Dedication Page

For my grandmother, Marjorie.

Acknowledgements

Many wonderful friends, family, colleagues, and faculty have supported my efforts throughout my doctoral program and in researching and writing this dissertation. First, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my doctoral committee, led by my senior advisor and chairperson, Dr. Marion Nesbit. Marion was a constant source of knowledge, experience, and support throughout my journey, and her mentorship was especially meaningful over this past year. To committee members Dr. Janel Lucas and Dr. Alicia Girgenti-Malone, I am very grateful for your commitment to my work. The encouragement and availability you gave me throughout the process was so important. Your willingness to read multiple drafts, share your insights, and provide feedback expanded my scholarship and enhanced the dissertation and my doctoral experience. I would like to express additional thanks to the Educational Studies program and the Lesley University Community: both provided me with rich personal development and learning experiences. To my participants, your insights and candor were truly remarkable and invaluable to this work, and there is so much to be learned from your experiences.

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Abstract

Prison skills programming that is focused on employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management is offered with an understanding that the information will support individuals with reentry in areas such as family reintegration and employment. The purpose of this mixed-methods dissertation study was to explore the reasons that individuals chose to participate in skills programming during incarceration and their perceptions about the ways in which skills programming influenced their experiences with family and employment during reentry. Data were collected from diverse participants using a Reentry Experiences Survey (RES) (Appendix A), in-depth interviews, and archival data from a background questionnaire administered to prisoners for a large national longitudinal literacy study (PIAAC PBQ). Findings showed that for skills programming participants, when programming was available and accessible, participation was viewed as a pathway to self-improvement and learning was positive, productive, and transformative. Participants revealed a range of experiences with direct and ambiguous loss during incarceration, difficulty with employment post-release, and a lack of availability of supportive programming for partners and children in their communities. They also identified a longing for opportunity to build skills, explore career options, and experience success with employment and relationships. A final finding emerged from inviting participants to imagine developing a prison education program from their lived experience that would better meet their needs for reentry. Crossing all guiding research questions, their responses identified social-emotional development, practical skills, and prescribed training programming as “must have” components of an ideal prison skills program. Findings suggest that asking those who experienced prison skills programs firsthand about their reentry experiences provided valuable insights that can inform both curriculum and instruction in prison program development and implementation.

Key Words: Incarceration, reentry, skills program, family, employment, loss

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

The prison population in the United States has increased 500% over the past forty years (The Sentencing Project, 2023) and, with 25% of the world's prison population, the United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world (World Population Review, 2023). The United States Bureau of Justice data on prisoners released in 24 states in 2008 indicated that 66% were rearrested within three years and 82% were rearrested within ten years of release (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021). This high rate of recidivism denotes an ineffective system of reentry for incarcerated individuals and the economic and human costs of repetitive imprisonment are exorbitant and incalculable. Yet little is known about the reentering population of individuals, about the adequacy of their preparation, and their experiences after they leave prison and transition into the community and society. The voices from lived experiences of individuals who have been incarcerated and reentered into the community represent an untapped source of information and insights about the magnitude of the rate and what would be helpful to prepare and support the process of a successful reentry.

The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore the reentry process to gain insights about the connection between prison skills programs and the individuals' actual reentry experiences in the years following release. The reentry period, the time when an individual is released from prison and transitions from incarceration back into the community, is critical (nicic.gov). This is the time when individuals who are newly released from prison are expected to reintegrate into their families and are expected to secure employment to support themselves financially. The emotional and financial support that family connection and employment provide to these individuals is crucial to successful reentry (Flake, 2015; Wallace, et al., 2016; Western & Sirois, 2019).

Individuals who lack these supports and find they are not able to integrate into life outside of prison also may not meet requirements of court-ordered community supervision, such as probation or parole, or be able to find and sustain employment to take care of basic needs. If unsuccessful in finding stable employment and personal support in familial, friend, or community connections, these individuals risk relapse into criminal behaviors leading to subsequent rearrest and reincarceration, otherwise known as recidivism (Silver, et al., 2021).

Recidivism, the headcount of those who return to prison, stands as the mainstay measure by which programs are evaluated. In other words, rather than assessment of an individual's skills or checking on their success or failure following release in gaining employment or attaining supportive family relationships in reentry, recidivism rates are described by Dewe as the "lone metric" (2017, p. 22) that is used to determine the success of skills education programs. The lack of investigation about programs or regard for the reasons why an individual recidivates so they can be addressed is puzzling. Perhaps more puzzling is that the perceptions of recently incarcerated people, those with lived experience who were enrolled in skills programs and went through the post incarceration reentry process, are not sought. The lack of attention to discovering what types of learning in the prison setting is influencing prisoners as they navigate reentry. This is especially important given high rates of recidivism, mass incarceration, and the complexities of the criminal justice system. Along with calls for prison reform, respecting those who were incarcerated and valuing their insights and opinions are important in a larger drive toward social justice (Alexander, 2012; Gilmore, 2007).

Conducting research about prison programs can be challenging as they vary, and there is no apparent standard approach (Dewe, 2017). Programs may involve many different areas of education, treatment, and training. In considering options for the orientation of reentry, this

dissertation focused on those skills education programs that targeted some aspects of reentry, with the understanding that life skills would be needed for individuals to support themselves when they are released from prison. The skills learning programs of focus here are: employment readiness (e.g., how to find a job, interviewing skills), reentry skills (e.g., securing housing, securing health insurance, accessing transitional supports such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or transportation), parenting and family relationships (e.g., how to care for children, parenting and/or co-parenting skills), life skills (e.g., personal finance, problem solving, decision making, goal setting), and anger management (e.g., alternatives to violence, domestic violence programs) (Dewe, 2017; PIAAC PBQ, 2017).

There is little research about programs, and prisons are run according to the laws of their jurisdiction, which may be federal, state, or county. However, there are standards for treatment that relate to prison programming. In 2010, the American Bar Association (ABA) approved a set of standards for the treatment of prisoners. This set of standards states that prisoners "should be engaged in constructive activities that provide opportunities to develop social and technical skills, prevent idleness and mental deterioration, and prepare the prisoner for eventual release" (ABA, 2023). Further, the standards cite programs such as job readiness training, personal financial responsibility training, parenting skills, relationship skills, to "promote good behavior in the facility and reduce recidivism" (ABA, 2023). Because this set of standards exists, this study included individuals who participated in skills programming while incarcerated, those who did not participate due to ineligibility or unavailability, and those who were eligible to participate in skills programs and chose not to do so. Exploring the reasons given for participation and non-participation along with perceptions about those experiences was intended to deepen the inquiry and information about skills programming and the perceptions about its influence on reentry.

Further research is needed to go beyond the single metric of recidivism to add depth of understanding about why some individuals recidivate while others do not, to recognize what factors are involved, such as intersectionality, and to investigate more directly the content of life skills programming and how the individuals who actually participated in the learning programs found that content of courses and programs affected, facilitated or did not, their reentry and connections with family and work.

Personal Perspective of the Researcher

Through work with incarcerated men and women over the last decade, I became interested in how skills education programs that are offered inside prisons specifically address family relationships and employment after release. For example, Foster and Hagan (2009) referred to a "family churning" process by describing how "families often decompose and reconstitute with surrogate parents and new stepparents in response to parental departures and returns to and from prison" (p. 183). Many studies recommended targeted and ongoing screening, support, and services during incarceration and in the reentry period in order to strengthen family relationships and mitigate family churning and the chronic instability experienced by families experiencing incarceration and reentry (Foster & Hagan, 2013; Geller, et al., 2011; Travis, 2005; Turney, 2014; Turney & Goodsell, 2018), but these types of services were not available to the people with whom I worked.

Because most incarcerated people are shut out from opportunities before, during, and after their imprisonment (Alexander, 2012), I began to wonder if and how individuals' learning skills in programs while they were incarcerated influence them after they leave prison. Does what they learn influence their reentry into their communities? Might their learning help influence their reentry, for example their reintegration with their families or how they seek

employment? Feeling called to work with the incarcerated, I wanted to learn more about how to help people in prison gain access to learning that would be meaningful, that might ignite positive transformation and a chance for increased opportunity.

Previous work on my Student Sociocultural Perspective (SSP) was pivotal in identifying how my own experiences with poverty, classism, and education created the connection I feel to my work with incarcerated and reentering individuals. The SSP work was important to this dissertation as it helped to focus my curiosity and inquiry while it also helped me to discover areas of potential bias.

While working in the prison system, I was surprised to notice little emphasis on program sequence and content, transferability to skills from prison into the community, or on interest in program integrity. Dewe (2017) defined prison program integrity as a standardized practice that requires that programs collect data, have measures of success, and track participants after their release. Along with this shortfall of a lack of evaluation of skills learning programs, there were other puzzling variations in my work. These included variations in how inmates were selected to participate in programs, choice and type of curriculum, and lack of follow up after release to see how the program may have helped or not. In the settings where I worked, there was little focus by the administrators of the facility or the educational departments on the skills learning that was scheduled and listed in the system operations. There were also no follow up services or wraparound services for individuals post-release. It seemed as if incarcerated individuals and reentering individuals were treated as separate entities rather than one and the same.

This notion led to my curiosities about the disconnect between individuals' experiences with prison skills programming and their future experiences post-release. Could understanding more about individuals' experiences with skill programming and their perceptions about how

skills programming influenced their reentry deepen understanding about what is needed to best prepare individuals for reentry and maintaining their connections to family and employment in the community?

To explore formerly incarcerated individuals' perceptions of the skills they learned in prison programs, I was able to explore the reasons for individuals' participation or non-participation in skills programs, and their perception of the influences of their learning in those programs on their family relationships and on their capability to secure and maintain employment. A mixed methods design was used for the study with a phenomenological qualitative approach for the interview segment and two points of triangulation that were numeric: the RES and PIAAC PBQ archival data. With support and permission, the Reentry Experiences Survey (RES) was developed using the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies Prison Background Questionnaire (PIAAC PBQ) as a model. The interview protocol (Appendix B) that was created and used for qualitative interviews used the RES questions for guidance in the development of more in-depth questions and cues. This approach allowed for a more holistic stance, viewing participants' experiences during incarceration and reentry as deeply connected experiences and not separate events.

Statement of the Problem

Little is known about the ways that the learning in prison skills education programs is perceived by the individuals closest to the programs: the participants who experienced the programming. In addition, there is little research about what happens to those individuals after they have been released from prison to reenter into the community to know if the learning has made any difference. In fact, recidivism rates are used to determine if reentry is successful, even though those rates only report the number of individuals who return to incarceration and do not

include data on those who do not recidivate. Moreover, recidivism rates offer no understanding of the reasons why individuals' actions result in another imprisonment as recidivism data do not include any qualitative factors, such as what individuals perceive to be necessary to support family reintegration or to succeed in finding and sustaining employment.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Since most research about prisoners' success or failure during the reentry process involves measurement of recidivism rates rooted in failure, there is little known about why they fail or why and how others do not recidivate or if and how they succeed, the majority of literature reviewed for this study tended to focus on the negative factors. For example, scholars have studied the deleterious effects that incarceration has had on family finances (McKay, Lindquist, et al., 2018; Naser & Visher, 2006), employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Silver. et al., 2021; Western & Sirois, 2019), relationships (Comfort, et al., 2005; Kazura, 2018; Liu & Visher, 2021; McKay, Comfort, et al., 2018; Yaros, et al., 2018), and health (Le, et al., 2018; Wildeman, et al., 2013). A few scholars have explored the relationship and influence of prison programming on factors such as recidivism and employment (Bruns, 2017; Duwe, 2017); however, they have not examined the connection between an individual's participation in prison skills education programs and the reentry period following incarceration, nor have they asked the incarcerated, those who lived the experiences, for their perceptions about how what they learned influenced their reentry into family and employment.

This study explored the reasons individuals had for participating in skills programming during their incarceration and how, or if, they believed their participation and learning from the prison skills programs affected their reentry into family life and employment. The following

research questions were developed to learn more about individuals' lived experiences with skills programming, reentry, their families, and employment:

1. What reasons do individuals provide for participation or non-participation in skills programming during their incarceration?
2. In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming influences family life and family relationships post release?
3. In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming during incarceration influences their ability to obtain and sustain employment post release?

Definition of Terms

Community: The place that a reentering individual resides and/or is employed post-release.

Incarceration: Confinement to jail, prison, or other facility where individuals are locked up to await a trial or serve a court mandated sentence (bjs.ojp.gov).

Jail: A facility run by a county or locality that houses pre-trial inmates and those who are convicted of lesser crimes and serving shorter sentences (bjs.ojp.gov).

Prison: A state or federally run facility for convicted individuals serving sentences that are typically longer than one year and up to a life sentence (bjs.ojp.gov).

Prisoner: An individual detained or incarcerated in a jail, prison, or other facility to await a trial or serve a sentence.

Prison Life Skills Programming: A prison learning program is a teaching/ learning endeavor run by employees and volunteers in a prison educational department. Programs range across the following subject matter: employment readiness (e.g., how to find a job, interviewing skills), reentry (e.g., securing housing, securing health insurance, accessing transitional supports such as

the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or transportation), family relationships (parenting, coparenting, healthy families), life skills (e.g., personal finance, problem solving, decision making, goal setting), and anger management (conflict resolution, alternatives to violence) (Dewe, 2017; PIAAC PBQ, 2017).[1]

Program Integrity: A government term and practice to work for quality of programming and against fraudulent activity through the use of a standardized evaluation practice in prisons that requires programs to collect data, have measures of success, and track participants after their release (Dewe, 2017).

Recidivism: A former prisoner is rearrested and charged following an individual's relapse into criminal behavior after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime (nij.ojp.gov). In the case of this study, all individuals have been incarcerated.

Reentry Process: The process in which incarcerated individuals transition back into the community after their release from incarceration (nicic.gov).

Note: The terms "jail" and "prison" are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

Significance of the Study

This study is important in two principal areas: (1) the organization and delivery of prison skills programs, and (2) the benefits this could create for incarcerated and reentering individuals, their families, potential employers, and the community. Because the study valued the individual voices and experiences of its participants, it avoided viewing incarcerated and reentering individuals monolithically. Valuing the voices of the participants could support skills programs to be designed according to the expressed needs and wants of people who have experienced

[1] Vocational skills programs are not included as a part of this dissertation research.

incarceration and reentry. This might be a missing piece in designing programs that better prepare incarcerated individuals for their reentry and reduce the risk of recidivism.

If reentering individuals are better prepared for reentry and have positive experiences with thoughtfully developed, effective skills programming, they may be more likely to connect with their communities in positive ways. This could include partners and children as well as potential employers. Partners would benefit from romantic partnerships that are healthy and intact and children would benefit from strong parenting and coparenting skills. This could mitigate some of the collateral consequences of incarceration that contribute to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Community employers could benefit from this study from a pool of better prepared applicants and employees. This, in turn, would assist reentering individuals in supporting themselves and their families through legal work and contribution to the community. Connected and healthy family relationships and obtaining and maintaining employment support strength and stability within the community.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited to individuals who were incarcerated in the United States within the previous nine years. A 9-year release period was chosen because it reflects the Bureau of Justice 2018 research and report on prisoner recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice, “a 9-year follow-up period shows a much fuller picture of offending patterns and criminal activity of released prisoners than prior studies that used a 3- or 5-year follow-up period” (bjs.ojp.gov).

The interview segment of this study took place during Covid concerns and was conducted over the phone for reasons of flexibility, accessibility, and safety. Phone interviews allowed for scheduling flexibility, particularly with subjects who were working and had family

responsibilities. Phone interviews also made it possible to interview subjects who lived in other parts of the country and did not require the extra travel time and scheduling of an in- person interview. While this would have been true for remote video interviews, it was the best option for accessibility as it did not require transportation, a phone with video capabilities, a personal computer, or the private space needed for a video interview. Finally, as the Covid pandemic has continued on, phone interviews provided the highest level of safety without venturing into spaces requiring contact with others or the restrictions of masks and social distancing. Because the interviews were audio, there may have been a loss of information because there was not an opportunity to observe nonverbal responses and behaviors. Safety was also the overriding factor in setting this delimitation for the method and instruments that were used.

Overview of the Literature Review

The theoretical frameworks of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000) and *bildung* (Humboldt, 1793/ 2012; Sorkin, 1983); ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986) and the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006); intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Potter 2015), and the family adjustment and adaptation model (Patterson, 2002) were examined for this dissertation. These theoretical frameworks provided a foundation for the literature review in Chapter Two and a structure for developing the research questions, contributing to the choice and content of the instruments, and reviewing the data collected.

The exploration of theoretical frameworks is followed by a presentation and comparative analysis of empirical literature that related both to prison skills learning and subsequent reentry. Particular focus was placed on literature that emphasized matters specific to reentry and to family reintegration and employment. The empirical literature section is divided into sections

that examine scholarship that used data sets from large national studies and studies that were regional or focused on single sites. The literature review highlights existing scholarship within these fields, identifies gaps in the literature, and presents ways that the present study fits into and builds upon the existing body of literature.

Overview of the Method

Although the research initially was built on a mixed methods sequential explanatory design that included and triangulated the RES survey, interview, and comparative analysis of the PIAAC PBQ archival data, the design required modification to rely primarily on interviews because of a low rate of return of the RES. Consequently, the interview was strengthened with an expanded protocol to address the three research questions, and the small RES and PIAAC PBQ were compared informally. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted using a phenomenological approach that was collaborative between researcher and participant (Smith, et al., 2009) and consistent with the relational, collaborative, and iterative nature of phenomenology (Van Manen, 2016). Because of the valuable insights that participants gained through lived experiences, a phenomenological approach was important because it allows participants to answer in their own words and remain connected to their experiences, words, and ideas.

This study incorporated triangulation into the research design to add perspective in addressing each of the research questions. According to Creswell & Creswell (2020), triangulation occurs when data from different sources are examined and used to justify themes that emerge from the data and add validity to a study. By incorporating three sets of data: the primary data collected from the interviews, results from a Reentry Experiences Survey (RES), and archival data from PIAAC PBQ, depth was added to the inquiry.

Participant Selection

To examine reentering individuals' perceptions of skills programs and how participation in skills programming influences the reentry process, previously incarcerated individuals who reentered society were designated as the population, and the specific participant group characteristics for this study included individuals who were incarcerated and released in the previous nine years, consistent with the time span reflected the latest recidivism data reported by the U.S. Bureau of Justice (bjs.ojp.gov). Participant ages were18-74 years, reflecting a wide age range that correlates with the age range for PIAAC PBQ (see Chapter Three for other factors used in the selection process).

For the RES survey, the participants (n = 10) were self-selected and responded to the online Qualtrics survey. The interview participants (n = 12) either self-identified from the RES or were referred by a fellow participant or a colleague. The twelve interview participants represented diversity racial and ethnic diversity as well as diversity in gender expression and sexual orientation. Archival data from the PIAAC PBQ included information collected from individuals who were incarcerated in 98 prison facilities (n = 1, 315) and took part in the PIAAC national literacy survey.

Data Collection Instruments

The study instruments included: (1) the RES survey, a 30 question quantitative (14 content questions and 16 demographic) questions. The RES was developed and distributed in consultation with analysts from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in Washington, D.C. and American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Arlington, Virginia who worked with the PIAAC PBQ; (2) qualitative interviews with a protocol that requested information relevant to the research questions with the twelve participants who fit the designated participant profile; and (3)

a comparison of the findings of those two instruments with the archived national PBQ findings to learn if and how results of this small scale study corresponded with large-scale national findings.

Data Collections Procedures

For the RES and the interview, informed consent was obtained prior to data collection (Appendices A and C). The RES was distributed and collected using the Qualtrics platform. Phone interviews were scheduled with participants who met the criteria and expressed interest in an interview. Interviews were conducted in English and took approximately an hour. The interview questions related to research questions and drew from the RES survey questions. Interviews of approximately one hour were conducted and recorded using Google Voice with a private phone number set up and used solely for the purpose of interviews. A digital recording device was used as a secondary back up recorder.

Data Analysis

Because of the small n return on RES with only 10 responses that did not justify full statistical analysis, informal analysis that included Qualtrics output in combination with personal coding analysis of the short answer questions were undertaken. Temi speech-to-text transcription software (www.temi.com) was used to transcribe the interviews, and three-part coding of the transcripts (Smith, et al., 2009), made way for emergent themes in the data. The Delve software application tool (www.delvetool.com) was used for hand coding the transcripts, which enabled creation of codes both inductively and deductively.

The PIAAC PBQ archival data were analyzed using the International Data Explorer (IDE). This tool was selected at the recommendation of the national consultants to pull reports from the database that correlated with survey questions. The PIAAC PBQ data served as points of comparison with the results from the RES and interview data analysis. The data collected from

the RES, the interviews, and the PIAAC archival data interrelated and played a role in the explanatory research process. The intent was to find richer, deeper meaning in the data with each iteration of analysis.

Data Management

RES Survey and interview data were and are managed to protect participants' privacy. All RES data were stored anonymously within the Qualtrics software program and accessed only on my password protected computer. The Qualtrics platform requires a separate, additional password to access the data. All audio files were transferred to the same password protected computer. Interview audio files were transcribed using Temi (www.temi.com) software, which also requires a separate password to access user account. The interview transcripts were printed for analysis and all printed materials were shredded because the data is kept in password coded digital storage. Delve software was used for coding analysis on the same password protected computer with a separate password protected account for the Delve software application. The researcher is the holder of all password coded information and the sole user of the password coded computer.

Role of the Researcher

As someone who has spent a decade working with incarcerated people as a teacher and administrator of skills programming, I have come to appreciate the potential of prison education and transformational learning to help individuals gain the skills perceived as needs for reentry. However, I have not had an opportunity to connect with individuals after they have left the system to learn about their perceptions of those programs in which they participated. Consequently, I do not know if or how they proved helpful or what individuals who were incarcerated found they needed to succeed during the reentry period.

This study was motivated by my curiosity to learn more about what formerly incarcerated individuals need to know to succeed in reentry, specifically in relation to their families and seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment. I worked throughout to recognize and consider my biases following the Creswell (2015) admonition to note the importance for a researcher to acknowledge how values and beliefs shape one's orientation to research, how data are gathered, and how biases can affect the research.

I selected a phenomenological approach for the interview along with the use of triangulation to counter inadvertent bias by providing several perspectives. In addition, I kept a log throughout data collection and analysis to challenge myself to review research transactions, explore how my values and beliefs might interface with the research process, and modify questions before the fact and keep careful attention to myself to avoid judgement in both data collection and analysis. Additionally, I used bracketing, a suspension of my beliefs in order to focus on what was essential (Creswell, 2015), as a way to counter bias. I incorporated bracketing by examining potential biases before and after each interview. My previous SSP work expanded my understanding of bias while at the same time increased my curiosity to learn more from the study participants and their experiences.

During the interviews, I followed an interview protocol consistent with the phenomenological approach to guide the process but also to allow participants as much opportunity as possible to speak about their experiences with skills programs and reentry. Active and attentive listening was used to guide follow up questions during the interview process (Smith, et al., 2009). Lastly, in addition to being used as a strategy to create collaboration and validity, member checking was also used as a measure for countering bias.

The relational, collaborative, and iterative qualities outlined were important for creating a study that both respected the individuals who agreed to serve as participants as well as alleviated some of the power structuring that could have undermined intended respect. Consistent with phenomenological method, study participants were viewed as co-investigators, serving the dual purpose of 1. removing stigma that may be attached to incarcerated individuals and 2. focusing on collaboration rather than the subject-object orientation that could result in creating an unwanted sense of "other" in study participants.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation uses a five-chapter format. This introduction chapter is followed by Chapter Two, a review of the literature which includes theoretical frameworks and existing empirical literature to present a wide spectrum of information including themes, relational, and developmental aspects of existing scholarship. There was an overlapping quality that was present in the literature, touching on prison skills programming, reentry, family relationships, and employment that created the foundation for this study and informed the method presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Three presents the research questions and details the design, method, instruments, and procedures that were used to examine the perceptions of individuals who have been released from prison about what they learned in prison skills programming and the influence this learning has had on the individuals' reentry into family life and employment. The chapter also provides the rationale for employing phenomenology for qualitative inquiry. This is followed by Chapter Four, which briefly reviews procedures for data collection and analyses, and IRB-approved adjustments to the method (Appendix D). The results of data analysis and findings are the focus, including demographic information about the study's twelve interview participants and the eight findings for the guiding research questions of the study. Lastly,

Chapter Five, which offers a summary of the overall findings followed by a discussion of each finding organized by the guiding research questions., discussion of the findings including comparisons with the literature in Chapter Two, suggestions for application and future research, and final reflections.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature

The literature review addresses the relationship between participation in skills programs and formerly incarcerated individuals' reentry experiences and features two main bodies of literature. The first section presents theoretical frameworks that provided structure to assist in the examination and understanding of individuals' experiences with incarceration, prison skills programs, and reentry. The use of these frameworks as a structure for the study was particularly helpful in the exploration of two important components of the reentry process: family relationships and employment. Transformative learning theory and *bildung*, intersectionality, ecological systems theory, and family adjustment and adaptation are complementary theories that provided ways of understanding participants' perceptions about their experiences with prison skills programming and the interface between their lived experiences of the reentry process, their family relationships, and employment.

The second section of the literature review presents empirical literature representing the scholarship surrounding prison life skills programming, family relationships during and after incarceration, and employment during the reentry period. These are organized by studies generated from large, national data sets followed by regional and single site studies. There was a surprising lack of literature featuring evaluation or analysis of specific life skills programs or life skills curricula. Research featuring these are included in the regional and single site studies section.

The studies that were reviewed exemplify the knowledge and recommendations from the research findings. Through common themes and overlapping recommendations, the empirical research revealed a deep connection between prison skills programming, reentry, family

relationships, and employment. This information provided a foundation for this dissertation that led to addressing gaps in the existing bodies of literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

Transformative Learning and Bildung

Programming within the criminal justice system is targeted at producing change for individuals by improving behaviors and reducing recidivism (Dewe, 2017). Central to the discussion of personal change is Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning (2000). Mezirow focused on the process in which individuals learn to "negotiate and act on…purposes, values, feelings, and meanings" in order to "gain greater control over [their] lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers" (p. 8). Mezirow outlined ten steps that comprise this shift. Beginning with "a disorienting dilemma," the steps toward transformation are compatible with the prison or jail setting and subsequent reentry into the community. Mezirow's transformative learning steps include the following:

> 1. A disorienting dilemma 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame 3. A critical assessment of assumptions 4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions 6. Planning a course of action 7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans 8. Provisional trying of new roles 9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships 10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 22).[2]

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[2] The list of transformative learning steps kept Mezirow's originally published numerical format intact.

Mezirow described transformative learning as a change in a person's frame of reference, or "the structures of assumptions through which [one] understands their experiences" (1997, p. 5). Because incarceration, and possibly the factors leading to it, may involve levels of stress or crisis that contribute to a "disorienting dilemma" that Mezirow connected to powerful learning, incarceration may provide an opportunity for learning that otherwise would not be available or noticeable. Being away from loved ones with few day-to-day responsibilities and perhaps experiencing boredom, transformative learning could be aligned with the experience of incarceration and serve as a potential catalyst for self-reflection, autonomy, and change.

Multiple, unique approaches to transformative learning could ameliorate the limitations created by the prison environment. Because an individual's removal from home and family during incarceration is a strain both on the individual and left-behind partners and children (Arditti, et al., 2003; Naser & Visher, 2006; Turney, 2015; Wildeman, et al., 2013), finding ways to transition from disorientation to transformation may be valuable to individuals during incarceration and reentry. Green and Mälkki (2017) posited that since transformative learning is itself relational, conflicts in relationships constitute disorienting dilemmas. While they acknowledged that relationship conflict is not typically part of the transformative learning literature, "it is one that is encountered in most everyone's life" (p. 70) and "the serial resolutions of relationship conflicts can produce the micro-transformations that successful living seems to require while at the same obviate the need for major crises as the pre-requisite for transformation" (p. 70).

DeAngelis (2022) suggested that disorienting dilemmas are a common part of most adults lives but do not always create transformative learning (p. 585); however, both the classroom and teacher can be used to capture moments of disorientation and foster adult transformative

learning. This could prove to be important in the prison setting where classroom times and interactions are limited due to facility security needs and procedures. DeAngelis suggested that the exploration of the classroom setting would help researchers understand the relational space between student and teacher that could best enable both transformative learning and transformative teaching. The insights gained could potentially support the disorienting dilemmas that occur in the classroom setting when new information is acquired (p. 597).

In a study that employed interviews with 80 participants, Nohl (2015) observed that "transformative learning may begin unnoticed, incidentally, and sometimes even casually, when a new practice is added to old habits" (p. 45). Nohl's work was relevant to this study because it removed the requirement that participants interpret their experience of incarceration as disorienting or a dilemma in order to change their frames of reference and transform. According to Nohl, "transformative learning culminates in a phase of social consolidation and reinterpretation of biography" (p. 46) which may allow people to "relate themselves new to the world" (p. 45).

Although a "disorienting dilemma" could be seen as "built in" to imprisonment, not all currently and formerly incarcerated people may experience or perceive it as such. Because the effects of learning might not be immediately apparent in a prison situation, where because of the controlled and restricted environment, there are not opportunities to put learning into practice. Nohl's modified model of transformative learning recognizes that the time of reentry—rather than incarceration--may provide individuals opportunity to reflect on the effects of their learning and to investigate transformative factors.

In a discussion of adult learning theory, Roumell (2018) differentiated transformative learning and learning transfer: "Learning transfer entails practicing the application of knowledge,

perspectives, and skills across contexts, while transformation would imply a fuller integration of the perspectives, knowledge, and skills into one's world perspective" (p. 16). This is an important distinction because Roumell's descriptions of transformative learning and learning transfer closely relate to the concept of *bildung*.

The concept of *bildung* was developed by Prussian philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt in the late eighteenth century and highlighted human development and "self-formation" (Sorkin, 1983). Humboldt (1793/ 2012) wrote

> It is the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay. (p. 58)

In a shift that moves from understanding self to understanding self in relation to others, *bildung* requires (1) to be "assured of the freedom to act for oneself, that is, to be self-reliant" and (2) social intercourse: "one develops through the voluntary interchange of one's individuality with that of others. Self-formation, in other words, requires social bonds" (Sorkin, 1983, pp. 58-59). The theory and framework have enriched this study because both freedom and social connection relate to the process of reentry. Applying *bildung* illuminated a drive toward discovery of self, followed by discovery of self in relation to others.

Bohlin (2013) interpreted the concept of *bildung* as "a process of transforming one's own perspective in encounters with others" (p. 391) which is "strongly connected to intercultural understanding" (p. 392). This is an important idea for this study as it related to individuals' experiences with employment and the potential to have successful relationships with others

outside of their families: “Entering into dialogue with others who think differently, we question the premises of our ordinary ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, and our meaning perspectives change in response to the encounters with their alternatives” (p. 398).

Like transformative learning theory, *bildung* differentiates practical, surface-level learning from a self-reflective internal process that changes an individual. According to Buttigieg and Calleja (2021), transformative learning and *bildung* are processes unique to the individual: “Transformative learning is grounded on the human need to seek meaning in life and also to try and understand one’s experiences” (p. 169) and *bildung* is “a collective emancipatory process of self-formation with the realization of human autonomy as one of its main ideals” (p.174). In transformative learning theory and *bildung,* humans are not only viewed as “functional beings but also subjective with a developing consciousness regarding the self, others, and the world and intersubjective through relationships with others” (p. 179). *Bildung,* as related to transformative learning theory, was important to this study because it is rooted in development that is accompanied by independence, self-sufficiency, and change. Koller (2021) stated that there are aspects of bildung that involve “higher-level learning processes in which we do not only acquire or appropriate new content…the way in which people act toward and relate to the world, other people, and themselves is subject to radical transformation” (p. 636).

Ecological Systems Theory and the Bioecological Model

In addition to focus on the potential of transformative power of adult learning on the individual, the exploration of skills programming reentry required ways of contextualizing the influence of family and society on an individual as well as the interplay between individuals and social systems. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1977, 1986) and the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) provided a framework to

explore how an individual's experience with incarceration and reentry interacted with family relationships and employment. Ecological systems theory and the bioecological model gave scaffolding for inquiry about participants' lived experiences as well as exploring the context of the experiences and the ways the different aspects of these events reacted and interacted with one another.

Bronfenbrenner developed a nested model containing four systems of human development (1977): the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem was defined as the complex relations between the person and the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This primarily includes family relationships, the home, and the religious community. Within the microsystem, close family relationships are seen as a driving force of development. Consequently, for incarcerated and reentering mothers and fathers and their partners, "parental functioning is thus a critical variable of interest" (Arditti, 2005, p. 252).

Bronfenbrenner viewed the mesosystem as encompassing day-to-day interactions and connections at home, school, or work; with immediate and extended family; and with peers. Individuals who have reentered into the community from incarceration experienced a unique shift between two worlds. For individuals and their family members, the mesosystem may present interactions and connections that are positive and supportive or detrimental, and these may be an important underpinning of triumphs and failures in the reentry process.

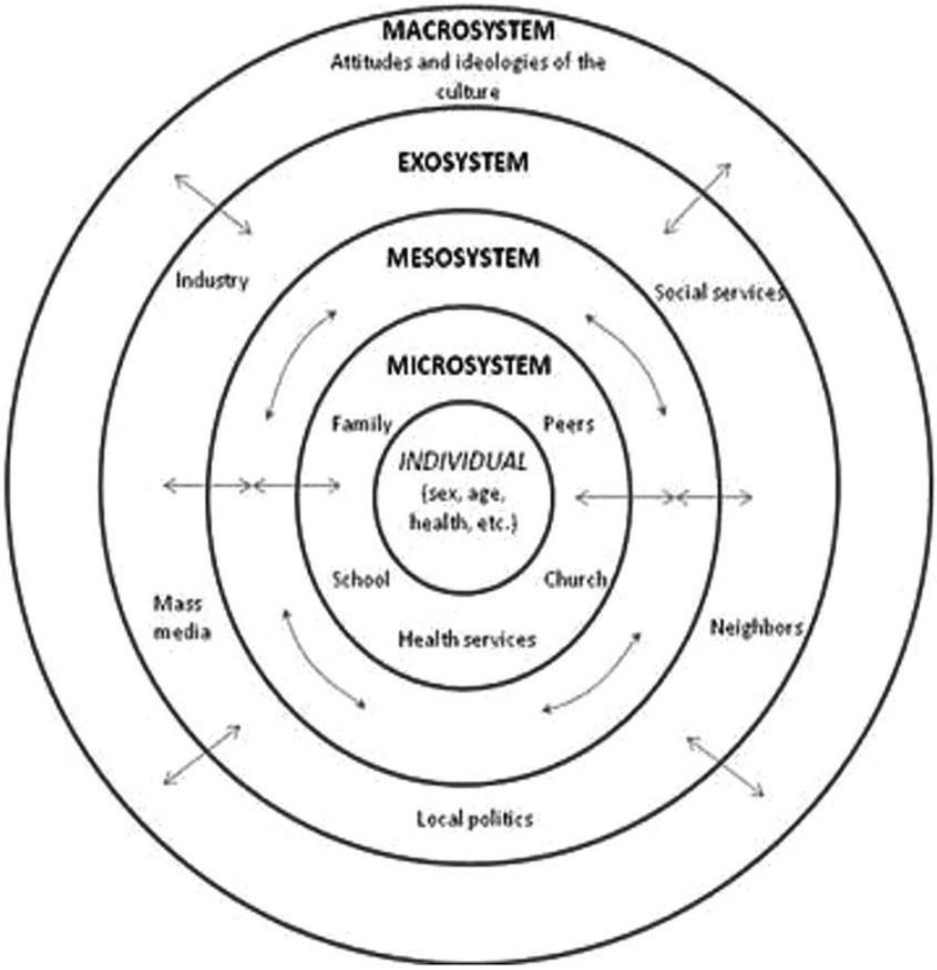
An extension of the mesosystem, Bronfenbrenner saw exosystem as inclusive of other influencing institutional systems and contexts, such as the supervising entities of probation and parole, transportation agencies, and public assistance services. In terms of prisoner reentry, there were issues that were specific to this system, such as the context that imprisonment holds for the

individual, the practices within the prison facility, and “the influence the incarcerative setting and subsequent reentry into the community poses for the family via the imprisoned family member” (Arditti, 2005, p. 252).

Macrosystems were viewed as the predominant patterns and ideologies of society, such as political, educational, economic, and social systems. Macrosystemic influence was important to the study as it allowed for the consideration of how incarceration and reentry impact the individual’s family relationships and employment through the lens of established institutional norms. Figure 1 shows a visual representation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory.

Figure 1

Ecological Systems Nested Model



Note: this illustration was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977, p. 514) and was later updated by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006).

Bronfenbrenner's and Morris' later work to outline the bioecological model of human development (2006) was useful in examining the impact of incarceration on families as they differentiated, expanded, and integrated the 1977 nested model and concepts of environment. This was done by enhancing the model to include chronosystems to indicate time along with the introduction of proximal processes, the developmental interactions that take place between individuals and their environments.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Bronfenbrenner and Morris' bioecological model of human development provided structure and support for this study. Since the models are "sensitive to contextual factors in the environment and diverse family structures and residential patterns" (Arditti, 2005, p. 252), and recognize interaction, interrelationships, and change, the model offered a lens that was fitting for the complexities of the participants' lived experiences, particularly those specific to their reentry, their family relationships, and their ability to obtain and maintain employment.

Dyer, et al. (2012) completed a review of 40 years of literature on incarcerated fathers and their family relationships (19 studies with fatherhood as the primary construct and 20 that related to fatherhood indirectly). The researchers found that ecological systems theory allowed for detailed specifics surrounding father-family interactions while highlighting the uniqueness and multidirectional nature of the effects of imprisonment: "Important variations in the effects of incarceration exist and are influenced by preincarceration family relations, racial-ethnic background, and age of the child" (p. 42). Ecological systems theory as a framework in this study was important to understanding the layers and dimensions that exist in families with an incarcerated or reentering parent.

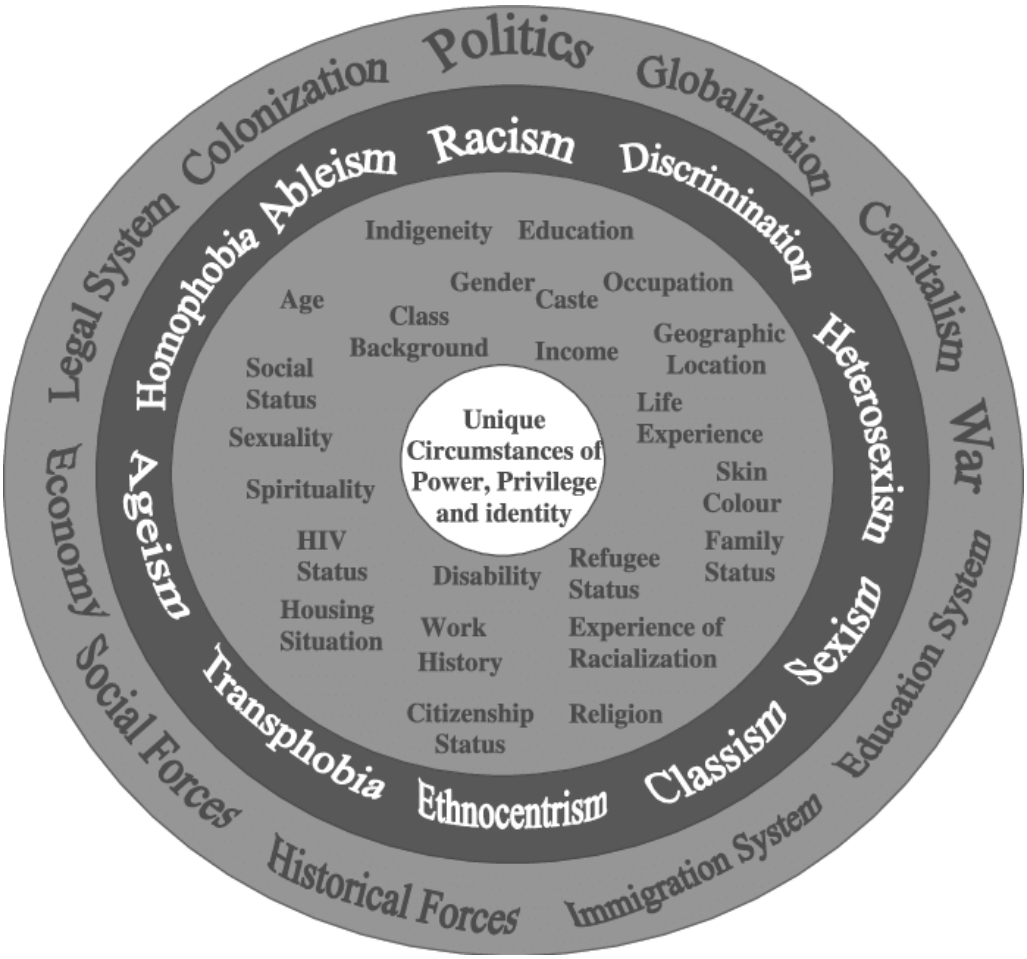
Intersectionality

Intersectionality, first defined by Crenshaw (1989) as a "multidimensional" approach rather than a "single-axis analysis" (p. 139), honors the richness and uniqueness of lived experiences. Intersectionality was chosen as a framework for this study because of its inclusivity of multiple dimensions and avoidance of a compartmentalized approach that might view participants only in a singular manner (e.g., "formerly incarcerated"). Though intersectionality was originally used in work highlighting the experiences of Black women, to be intersectional is

to use an approach that maintains openness to realize the various identities an individual may have. Figure 2 is a model of intersectionality. The model depicts intersectionality in four layers, moving from individual experience in the center outward. The two outer layers represent institutional and social discrimination followed by many of the unique and overlapping qualities that constitute identity, and in the center, one's personal circumstances of power, privilege, and identity.

Figure 2

Intersectionality Model



Note: Simpson, 2009, p. 5

Researchers have noted the benefit of espousing an intersectional position in relation to incarceration, reentry, and individuals' lived experience because it supports an openness between people and systems and acknowledges the dimensions of relationship between them. Cho, et al. (2013), wrote that the intersectional approach to query is to think "about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (p. 795). This built upon the work of Collins (2000), who described systems of power and oppression as "matrices of domination," in which a "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression" (p. 18).

Incarceration stands as a historically biased institution that disproportionately affects minorities (Alexander, 2012). Inquiry about individuals who are impacted by incarceration has benefitted from an intersectional lens that recognizes and acknowledges multidimensional identities. According to Freeman (2019), to use intersectionality is to "understand that oppression operates via multiple categories (e.g., gender, race, class, ability) and that intersecting oppressions lead to different lived experiences" (p. 3).

Christian and Thomas (2009) used the concept of intersectionality to examine extant research about Black women and mass imprisonment. They found that intersectionality was "relevant to the growing body of research about mass imprisonment because involvement with prison, either as an inmate or through connections to incarcerated individuals, creates another disadvantaged status that interacts with the other subordinated statuses that Black women face" (p. 70). They recommended that "researchers and policy makers must take a multidimensional approach to understanding the phenomenon" (p. 80). More broadly, Potter (2015) saw intersectionality as a framework that offered depth and detail inclusive of both individuals and systems related to their incarcerations and their reentry journeys and acknowledged the

influencing factors of gender, race, culture, and class for incarcerated and reentering people. Potter described this as "conceptualizing the intensity and realness of a person's various social identities in a stratified world in thinking of these identities as *braided*" (p. 152).

In terms of incarceration and reentry, applying intersectionality can broaden and deepen inquiry to get past problems from a more unidimensional focus. In an analysis of the findings of an investigation conducted by the Ombudsman in Victoria, Australia and the subsequent Multiple and Complex Needs Initiative (MACNI), Bunn (2019) stated that "a number of problems have been highlighted with traditional concepts of reentry, most notably that they rely upon a set of assumptions that contradict the lived experiences of people leaving prison" (p. 330). Bunn further reasoned that "traditional theories often assume that successful rehabilitation of a prisoner has occurred simply by way of their imprisonment, and that the person is now unquestionably equipped to deal with the pressures of release" (p. 330). This stance is reflected in the literature when prison and reentry are treated separately, and individuals and carceral systems similarly are treated separately. Bunn (2019) explained, "upon release, criminal justice, social service and treatment systems work in tandem, and *through* each other, to exclude ex-prisoners from accessing appropriate support, thus increasing their risk of re-criminalization" (p. 334).

An intersectional, rather than a one-dimensional or compartmentalized approach, can enhance scholarly discourse surrounding incarceration because it shifts and broadens thinking in looking at incarcerated and reentering individuals, their families, and their interactions with employment, community, family, and social supports as intertwined. According to Bunn (2019), this may help to "more accurately understand why so many men and women continually cycle through prison and its carceral extensions within the community" and "help us to chart a more

effective, fair and empowering response to assisting prisoners post-release" (p. 341). Bunn's statement underscored the importance of viewing intersectionality as embracing the interconnectedness between multidimensional individuals and the multiple systems of incarceration and reentry to deepen understanding and create inroads for change.

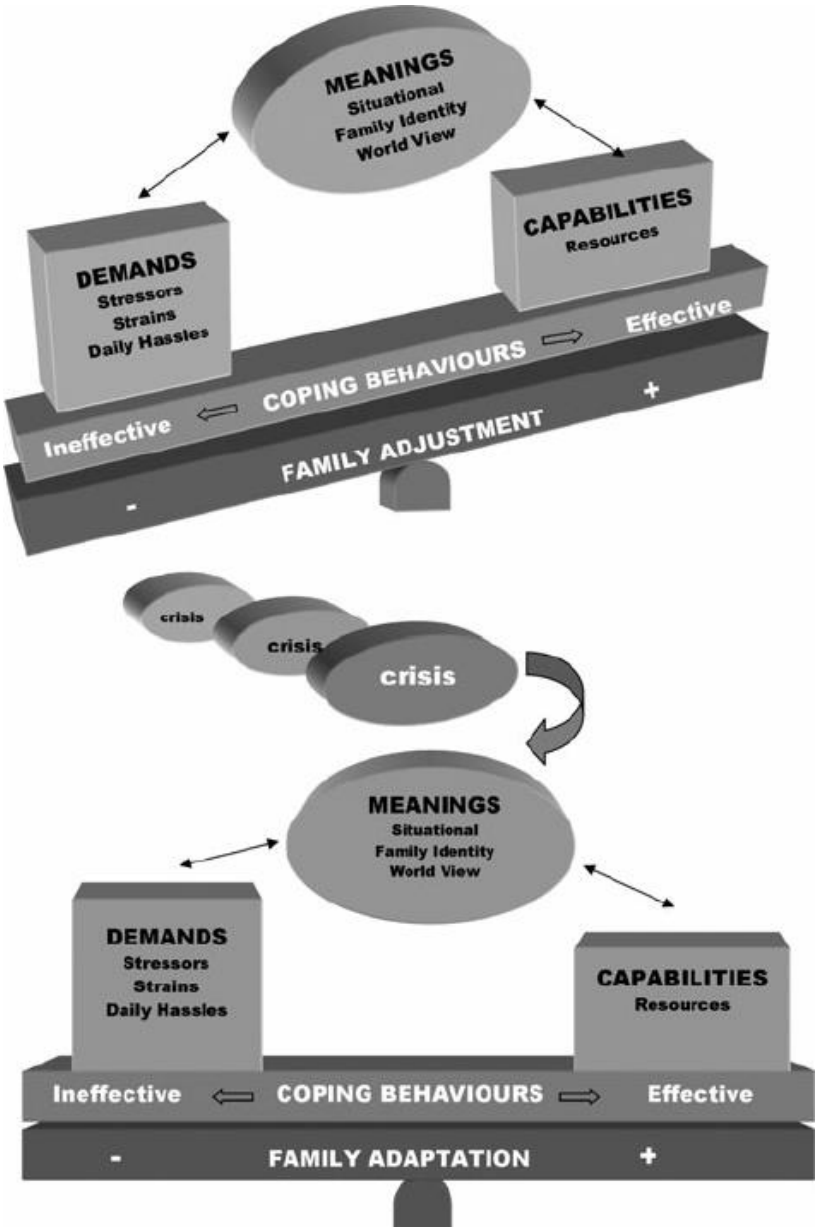
Family Adjustment and Adaptation

This study's focus on formerly incarcerated individuals' family relationships required exploration into the ways that families respond to and cope with stress. It also involved an opportunity to illuminate the strengths of those families who do manage to stay healthy. Integrating these two concepts, Patterson (2002) proposed that there is a process within families consisting of dynamic interactions between risks and protective factors. The balancing of demands and capabilities both day-to-day (adjustment) as well as in times of crisis (adaptation) and the subsequent meaning-making that takes place in families determines what is referred to as "resiliency." Patterson rooted her work in Family Stress Theory and Family Resilience. Family Stress Theory explores how families respond to stressful events, interact with one another, and make meaning from those events (Boss, 2001; Hill, 1958). Family Resilience explores the family's capacity to recover from stressful events (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, 1994).

Figure 3 shows a visual representation of Patterson's Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model. The figure depicts the balancing aspect of pressures placed on families as well as the competencies that a family might possess to address those pressures. For example, smaller scale pressures require minor adjustment while larger scale pressures may require adaptation and change. Patterson's model incorporates family responses to stress (e.g., effective vs. ineffective coping strategies), a family's ability to adjust to stress by using skills and resources, and a family's interpretation of stress (e.g., meaning making).

Figure 3

Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model



Note: Patterson, 2002, p. 351

There are two reasons that family stress and family resilience and Patterson's FAAR model (2002) were important to this study. First, Patterson (2002) described family resilience as a process, not just a capacity (p. 353). Because it is a process made up of layered interactions producing positive and negative outcomes, time, and place—as in the bioecological model—play a role in outcomes. Second, the dynamic nature Patterson described is inclusive of individuals and families who may not initially be described as resilient but who will *become resilient*. Understanding the balancing process of adjustment, adaptation, and resilience allowed for this study's inquiry into skills and supports for individuals and families. Looking at resiliency as a dynamic process rather than a static capacity was helpful in identifying which elements of that process may translate into teachable skills.

Along with the ability to teach skills surrounding resiliency, Patterson (2002) discussed the "cascading of risks" that occurs when a need is unmet: "It can generate more problems, hence increasing the risks" (p. 355). Patterson suggested that resources may be helpful to mitigate risk factors: "This cascading of risks often is related to having inadequate resources for meeting family needs" (p. 355). This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem which represents an area to bolster resources and supports through extended family members, peers, teachers, and community supports. For vulnerable families facing the disruption and dysregulation of incarceration, family stress theory and family resilience provided a structure for supports and resources to produce healthy outcomes.

Transformative learning and *bildung*, ecological and bioecological systems theory, intersectionality, and family adjustment and adaptation were chosen as the theoretical frameworks for this study. All of the theories addressed the complex and intertwining nature of identities and experiences and relationships with one another, and the theoretical

interdisciplinarity provided structure and room to explore the complexities involved in more depth. Deep inquiry was helpful in recognizing the individual's capacity and ability for change and personal and familial development.

Empirical Literature

The tension that exists between punishment and rehabilitation was evident in much of the literature that was examined for this study. Despite extensive research on the changes in rhetoric, policy, and rates of incarceration, little is known about the actual practices of punishment and prisoner rehabilitation besides a "switch from academic to reentry-related programs" (Phelps, 2011, p. 33). According to Potter (2015), the management of individuals in prison and the programming for those individuals has been problematic and does "not prepare incarcerated persons with tools and resources that would be especially useful for post-incarceration success" (p. 137). Despite this, the interest in prison skills programming and reentry has created a wide spectrum of scholarship. Nevertheless, this review revealed little standardization across programming and reentry practices from state to state or even facility to facility.

Determining what makes a program or an individual's reentry "successful" was not measured uniformly unless recidivism statistics were used. The fact that recidivism rates have been used for evaluation of multiple factors related to incarceration, including to determine the success of skills education programs, led Dewe to describe recidivism as a "lone metric" (2017, p. 22). Recidivism has been a mainstay quantitative measure by which programs have been evaluated, meaning that individuals who have not recidivated have been counted as "successes" without much, if any, qualitative inquiry into a person's own definition of success and quality of life and relationships.

Furthering the complexity of reentry scholarship was the "separate but related" quality of the inquiry. An example of this was given by Eddy and Burraston (2018) in their examination of 15 randomized control trials for different reentry programs for fathers. They found a lack of uniformity in both aspects of the programming and in the research about programming: "It turns out that the most scientifically rigorous work on outcomes from father reentry programs resides in not just one literature, but two nonoverlapping literatures" (p. 121). Eddy and Burraston categorized these two, nonoverlapping literatures as: multimodal reentry programs (e.g., cognitive skills training, substance abuse treatment programs, life skills programs) and unimodal relationship skills training (e.g., parenting, couples' programs). Eddy and Burraston suggested that bringing the two literatures together would require practitioners, researchers, and funders of these separate "camps" to "entertain new assumptions" (p. 123). This would require first acknowledging that soon-to-be released individuals are often parents and connected to other family members, and second, seeing the reentering individual's role is "is broader than parenting and couple relationship skills, and includes a wide variety of behaviors and tasks that enable him to take care of [one]self and of others in a variety of ways" (Eddy & Burraston, 2018, p. 123).

Whether the inquiry was about currently or formerly incarcerated individuals; or partners, family, or children; family relationships; or employment; the commonality that existed across the literature involved overt references to relationship and development. This was clearly seen in the studies' recommendations suggestions to "remove barriers to contact during incarceration" and to create programs that "reinforce "positive relationships with the family members [individuals] are likely to rely on after their release from prison" (Naser and Visher, 2006, p. 28) and family-friendly visits with "on-site support during family visiting" (Arditti, 2005, p. 258).

Some researchers were able to rely on data from large sample studies, such as the Serious and Violent Offender Initiative (SVORI), Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW), and/or the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) to study the implications of incarceration for families. Researchers who conducted studies exploring aspects and outcomes of programs and reentry within individual facilities or communities tended to use smaller samples, typically limited to the number of program attendees within a specific facility or region.

The following section of the literature review explores bodies of empirical literature focused on two areas: literature that focused on the family as a collateral consequence of incarceration and an important factor in the reentry process, and literature that focused on the employment and skills of incarcerated and reentering individuals. Both areas represent scholarship using data collected from large, national studies and data from smaller, regional, or single-facility studies. This review presents current scholarship, recommendations found in the literature, gaps that are present, and areas in which this study fits into the existing bodies of literature.

Large National Studies

The Serious and Violent Offender Initiative (SVORI). The Serious and Violent Offender Initiative (SVORI) was an ambitious federal program funded by the National Institute of Justice that began in 2003 and offered life skills programming to high risk incarcerated individuals with extensive criminal and substance abuse histories at 69 sites across several states (nij.ojp.gov, n.d.). Wave 1 of the study (n=2,391) included men (n=1,697); women (n=357); and male juveniles (n=337).

Participants in the program were asked about their anticipated needs before their release and were followed for up to 15 months post release. While SVORI revealed the need for

education, help with parenting and personal relationships, transportation, job training, and employment, the programs operating under the auspices of this initiative were unable to deliver services long-term. Reentering individuals who participated in SVORI programs showed "moderately better outcomes with respect to housing, employment, substance use, and self-reported criminal behavior," however these improvements were "not associated with reductions in official measures of reincarceration" (Visher & Latimore, 2007). Although SVORI participants were followed for several months of their reentry, it was unclear if any SVORI-sponsored programs recognized needs that emerged after an individual's release over the anticipated needs that were determined by participants before their release from prison.

Studies that utilized SVORI only included the data which is from serious and high-risk offenders, and thus individuals with lesser or misdemeanor charges were not included. The data allowed researchers to investigate the influence of family support on released prisoners during the reentry period. Using SVORI data to generate a final sample size of 550 individuals, Wallace, et al. (2016) found that family played an important role in an individual's mental health during reentry. They found that former prisoners who reported "negative family support" had poorer mental health outcomes. They recommended that researchers and programming consider "ways to foster familial support for prisoners both in and out of prison, as well as help families negotiate the strain and stress of a prisoner returning from prison" (p.16).

The family as a "barrier or catalyst to desistance depending on the environment of the family" was discussed by Liu and Visher (2021, p. 984), using SVORI data from 1,187 reentering men and women. Three findings were discovered: that family can be a protective factor providing support but can also bring tension; although family support did not affect post-release drug use, it did decrease recidivism while family tension increased drug use but did not

affect recidivism; and an intersection between gender and family tension affecting drug use post release was revealed with women experiencing greater risk for post-release substance use (p. 985). Recommendations included: fostering reunions between former prisoners and family members that are warm and supportive; the implementation of programs for both soon-to-be-released prisoners and their families that focus on preparation for release, cognitive change, and communication skills; counseling programs for incarcerated men and women that focus on interpersonal relationship management skills to mitigate the effects of abusive or toxic relationship, and finally, "to dismantle the malicious cycle of victimization, crime, release and re-victimization" (p. 987).

National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH). The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) is a yearly survey funded and directed by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) and administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey "provides rich data on multiple, intersecting aspects of children's lives—including physical and mental health, access to quality health care, and the child's family, neighborhood, school, and social context" (childhealthdata.org). The survey collects data on children's households, including whether a parent has served time in jail. These data were used to examine the relationship between parental incarceration and childhood health. Turney found that parental incarceration can cause and intensify stress among children, producing harmful health outcomes, namely learning disabilities, attention deficit, behavioral or conduct problems, developmental delays, and speech or language problems (2014).

The NSCH data were valuable in the examination of the effects of parental incarceration on children. The data were used to explore the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children's adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Turney (2018) found that children

exposed to parental incarceration (which is itself an ACE) were more likely than peers to have experienced additional ACEs. This included household member substance use problems, household member mental illness, and household member abuse. Children who experienced parental incarceration were also found to have had health and learning disadvantages more commonly than their peers. This included learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, developmental delays, speech or language disorders, and behavioral or conduct disorders (Turney, 2014). These findings, combined with the stigma that is often faced by families with an incarcerated family member, motivated Turney & Goodsell to suggest that prison and reentry programming needs to "tackle some of the most prominent factors that affect child wellbeing both during and after incarceration: relationships, co-parenting, economic hardship, and substance abuse" (2018, p. 160).

Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW). Studies that used data from another large, longitudinal study were examined for this section of literature. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW) was an undertaking of the Princeton University Center for Research on Child Wellbeing and Columbia Population Research Center study (fragilefamilies.princeton.edu). The FFCW study spanned two decades, from 1998 through 2020, and collected data from the primary caregivers for babies born between 1998 and 2000 at time of birth and at six other landmarks until age 22. This study included data collection if children in the study had incarcerated parents and data were further utilized in a collaborative study on fatherhood and incarceration.

Questions arose in the research as to whether the type of incarcerating facilities had differing impacts on family relationships and wellbeing. Turney (2015) suggested that, in terms of relationship quality, "prison incarceration may have more detrimental effects than jail

incarceration" because prisons are typically located far away from romantic partners and other family members, and accessibility can impact visitation. However, in the examination of the effects of differing local, state, and federal facilities on family functioning, researchers found no consistent differences across facility type (Wildeman, et al., 2016). This suggested that, while results from data representing prison incarcerations were more common in the literature, "jail incarceration may be just as important for family functioning as the long stints upstate or out of state that garner so much more scholarly and public attention" (p. 93).

Scholarship utilizing data from FFWC focused on paternal incarceration, rather than both maternal and paternal incarceration. Researchers found that paternal incarceration contributed to diminished relationship quality of male-female partnerships, both those that remained together during and after incarceration, and those that did not. The diminished quality of the relationship had "spillover" consequences on family life, including effects on adult and child physical and mental health, child wellbeing, family income loss, and financial strain, suggesting need for further investigation into links between incarceration and relationship quality (Turney, 2015).

FFWC data were used to study the relationship between partner incarceration and women's substance use. Bruns and Lee (2020) studied 3,733 mothers connected with an incarcerated male partner and found a significant association between male partner incarceration and female drug use. This association was especially concentrated among Black women, but not White women, Hispanic women, or women of other races and ethnicities. The researchers acknowledged that the White, Hispanic, and other race/ ethnicity subsamples were considerably smaller, but found that the relationship between partner incarceration and substance use did exist for Black women. Researchers attributed this to social contexts and "a social system that stratifies access to social goods based on skin color and ethnic origin" (p. 14). Because parental substance use and parental

incarceration are both ACEs that are connected with intergenerational disadvantage, researchers suggested a need to "rethink the population at risk" (p.15). This could be achieved by more thorough screening tools, such as asking about partner incarceration at a primary care visit along with decreasing barriers (e.g., childcare needs) and expanding access to treatment for women with an incarcerated partner, particularly Black women.

Research using the national study data included one initiative that examined paternal incarceration as a cause of economic risk faced by children (Geller, et al., 2011). This risk was viewed in relation to the impact of incarceration on employment and earnings, which affects fathers' ability to contribute financial support to their children. Recommendations for improving economic risk pointed to policy and programming that supports building "family bonds and economic opportunities" to improve parenting and reduce risk to children (Geller, et al., 2011).

Data from both NSCH and FFCW generated child- and family- wellbeing focused scholarship that pointed to adversities faced by children and families with a currently or formerly incarcerated parent. Turney and Goodsell (2018) completed a review of the data from both the NSCH and FFCW. They called for the development and implementation of programs for parents as well as for parents and their children as a way to address the adversities and inequalities disproportionately faced by children of incarcerated parents.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health). Add Health was a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 middle and high school adolescents beginning in the 1994-95 school year. Participants have been followed for five waves to date, most recently in 2016-2018 (Harris, et al., 2019). Add Health data were used in literature that explored risks connected with having an incarcerated parent during adolescence. Utilizing Add Health data, researchers explored several areas of adolescent health

and wellbeing, as these areas constitute overlapping concern for individual wellbeing, for social structures such as family and community, and for overall public health.

Inequity in educational attainment was found in adolescents with an incarcerated father. Foster and Hagan (2009) studied Add Health data and found that paternal incarceration related to decreased educational attainment. The researchers called for further exploration of other longer-term outcomes of parental incarceration, which they stated were likely to "involve a number of forms of social exclusion, from joblessness to disenfranchisement" (p. 190). In addition to identifying long term outcomes, Foster and Hagan recommended that more research be conducted to "sort out the broader range of costs and benefits of parents returning to their families and children, for both parents as well as their children" (p. 190).

Foster and Hagan (2013) found that Add Health data showed intergenerational stress proliferation of parental incarceration which was shown to be likely to impact minority families disproportionately. The data also supported a gendered loss hypothesis, with adolescents who experienced maternal incarceration more likely to encounter mental health issues and adolescents who experienced paternal incarceration at increased risk for substance use problems. While the researchers included discussion of the gender of the adolescents, the focus and findings of the study were on the gender of the parents: maternal and paternal incarceration. The researchers found that the gender of the individual who was "lost" to incarceration "closely paralleled" findings for parental death (p. 663). However, stigma surrounding parental incarceration could render adolescents with a parent in prison less likely to receive treatment and support for trauma and grief, mental health issues, or substance use disorders as peers with a deceased parent. Because of the disproportionate effects of minority families, it was recommended that policies be

developed to reduce racial disparities in parental imprisonment in order to structurally mitigate the risks of exposure to damage and disadvantage.

Recognizing a dearth of research on adolescent sexual health and public health concerns related to parental incarceration, Le, et al. (2018) revealed a relationship between young people with an incarcerated parent and increased sexual health risk factors. Using Add Health data, the researchers found that for young people, having an incarcerated parent "was associated with sexual risk-taking outcomes, specifically early sexual onset and sexually transmitted infections" (p. 4). Highlighting sexual health risk for incarcerated adults and their partners, this study found that the children of incarcerated parents were in similarly at-risk sexual health circumstances as their surviving parent (Wildeman, et al., 2013). This finding further extended public health concerns to those related to individuals involved in the criminal justice system. The researchers recommended targeted multi-pronged public health initiatives aimed at adolescents along with criminal justice reform "to minimize impact of parent-child separation" (p.7).

Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting, and Partnering (MFS-IP). The Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MSF-IP) is an evaluation of a grant program funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to promote or sustain healthy relationships and families with a criminal justice system-involved father who was recently released, on parole, or on probation (Bir, et al., 2017). Data collected as part of the MSF-IP were used in several studies examining family relationships post-release and the implications of a father's incarceration on the family. Studies using the MSF-IP data that were included in this review focused solely on incarcerated fathers and their family relationships post release and connected child wellbeing with father's wellbeing during the critical reentry period.

McKay, Feinberg, et al. (2018) studied MSF-IP data from 772 fathers to reveal deterioration in father-child relationships from pre-to post- incarceration. The researchers suggested that several variables influence the father-child relationships, including the age of the child, contact during incarceration, and the relationship with the child's other parent. Despite the deterioration that occurred, the researchers highlighted "a heightened commitment from many parents who do stay connected to their children" (p. 182). Researchers also found that after the fathers were released from prison, 43% saw their children as much as they had before they were incarcerated and 17% reported seeing their children more often than before their incarceration. ☺ This finding spurred the recommendation that reentry programming recognize the "central place of fatherhood in the self-concepts, goals, and day-to-day activities of the men" (p. 183).

In the analysis of a sample of 1,482 intact heterosexual couples from MFS-IP data, McKay, Lindquist, et al. (2018) documented the "challenges families face before and during a father's incarceration, and the equally striking efforts most make to maintain a family life and prepare for post release reunification in the face of those daunting circumstances" (p. 109). The researchers suggested a threefold approach for future research: the identification of protective factors that "predict healthy family life at reentry" (p. 110), a clarification of the strategies used by successful families to maintain their relationships during incarceration and post release, and finally, evaluation of the effectiveness of any interventions that support family relationships and child wellbeing.

Connection between fathers' wellbeing during reentry with their children's wellbeing was investigated using a sample of 431 children aged 6-17 years old. Yaros, et al. (2018) found three important factors in children's wellbeing during a father's release from incarceration: whether the father co-resides with the child or lives outside of the primary home, the role of father's

alcohol use post release, and the age of the child when father is released. Researchers suggested that rehabilitative programming, treatment, and support services are important for men both during and after incarceration to address and prevent problems with substance use. The need for change in the justice system was indicted in order to "promote positive contact" for families and "maintain and enhance relationships between fathers and their children while fathers are incarcerated to improve the chance of achieving positive relationships following release" (p. 158). This would occur by minimizing barriers to visitation during incarceration by implementing programs for fathers that focus on improving parent-child relationships.

Regional and Single-Site Studies

Research that collected and analyzed data from programs and/or participants within a single facility, state, or region and utilized smaller sample sizes explored a wide spectrum of issues facing reentering individuals and their families during and after incarceration. Parallel to the scholarship born from large national studies, research from these inquiries found that because individuals released from prison are expected to reintegrate into their families and secure employment to support themselves and their dependents, the emotional and financial support that family connection and employment provide to reentering individuals is crucial to successful reentry (Flake, 2015; Wallace, et al., 2016; Western & Sirois, 2019).

Family Ties and Reentry. According to Tripp (2009), "in a sociopolitical culture that rallies around the need for two-parent homes, there is little within the justice system that answers this call" (p. 53). Emphasis on family relationships and reintegration as essential to the reentry process was prevalent in the literature as an ideal but not perceived as a reality. Several studies on incarcerated and reentering parents suggested that both parents and their children may benefit

from parenting programs that are progressive, inclusive, family friendly, or that use non-traditional methods (Datchi et al., 2016; Tadros & Finney, 2018; Yaros, et al., 2018).

One study explored how mothers who participated in a parenting program while incarcerated fared in applying parenting principles that were taught in the program with their children (Alsem, et al., 2021). While some intervention effects were maintained in one area, the study showed that "maintenance of treatment gains is difficult for disadvantaged families" (p. 9). For reentering mothers, it was suggested that continuing to teach and review skills in the reentry period may aid in the application of knowledge and skills in real-life circumstances. Researchers recommended that parenting training and ongoing family support post release would be beneficial to the family.

Weseley and Dewey (2019) interviewed 30 reentering women, most of whom were mothers, about their perceptions of their pathways into crime and their related struggles upon reentry. The researchers found that women's pathways into crime differed from men, and that reentry programming was focused on "narrowly defined recidivism" (p. 11) and "subjective concepts such as success and change" rather than the participants' definitions of success, such as independent living, helping family, internal changes that differ from old ways of living, and perseverance in the face of challenges (p. 13). The researchers called for a "more nuanced" definition of reentry success (p. 11), and balanced funding "between the costly criminal justice system and the poorly funded social service agencies that struggle to provide a modicum of support to formerly incarcerated women" (p. 12).

The call for "wraparound" style services beginning during incarceration and extending into the reentry period was echoed in recommendations for both men's and women's reentry (Miller, 2021; Le, et al., 2015). In addition to gender-specific reentry services for women, the

comprehensive treatment for mental health and substance use disorders, ongoing support for housing, employment and skills training, and the maintenance of family bonds were highlighted. It was recommended that "newly funded or implemented programs should be designed so that treatment begins at least 90 days prior to release and continues for a period under community supervision" (Miller, 2021, p, 16). In a study of familial influence on reentry among formerly incarcerated Latino men (n = 16), Lee, et al. (2015) found that the men's reentry was influenced through social control and social support from the family. Defining reentry as a process rather than an event, the study recommended connection to ongoing social and familial resources during the reentry period.

Further recognizing that families "play a key role in the success of prisoner reentry," (Datchi, et al., 2016, p. 93) Datchi, et al. suggested that the lens of Couple and Family Psychology (CFP) be used to shift reentry programming toward a "multisystemic approach to offender reentry" that includes family reentry services such as case management and psychoeducational services that are delivered in the community post-release. Kazura (2018) studied 40 couples (40 male inmates and 40 female partners) who took part in relationship enhancement program. The program improved positive feelings about the relationship, knowledge of relationship risk factors, improved conflict resolution and improved communication skills. The study suggested that once intervention programs are concluded, support groups or refresher courses need to be provided for the continued practice and application of skills (p. 2597), with the researcher noting that the finite amount of time for this program made follow up after the men's release impossible.

Understanding the important role that family members play in the success of reentering individuals, Naser and Visher (2006) surveyed 247 family members of recently released male

prisoners. They found that most family members were highly supportive of their reentering family member, and that this included emotional support and financial support, sometimes in the form of providing housing for the reentering individual. Ninety percent of respondents indicated that "it would be pretty or very easy to renew their relationship with their recently released family member" (p. 26). Family members also reported their own hardships in assisting their reentering family member in the areas of their own financial hardship and increased anxiety. The study recommended that the reunification process begin *before* release by reducing barriers to communicating with an incarcerated family member either in person or on the phone. This would include assisting family members with increased contact with their incarcerated family member by housing prisoners closer to their home communities and reducing cost of phone calls of the family members who will be supporting a newly released prisoner with reentry. The researchers also recommended that reentry services supporting family members be implemented.

A component of pre-reentry, in-person visits carry financial implications as well as potential problems for the families of prisoners. There are costs associated with travel to the correctional facility, and these costs are more severe for the families of inmates who are placed in facilities far from their homes (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018). In these cases, the additional costs of food, lodging, and childcare expenses are added on to basic transportation costs (Comfort, 2007; McKay, Lindquist, et al., 2018). They suggested that while many researchers and policymakers recognized the need for prison visitation that is more family- or child-friendly, this is not yet instituted as common practice in facilities.

The literature's general call for extended, more supportive, family- and child-friendly programming and services aligns with Benning and Lahm's study (2016) that discussed the benefits to prison facilities when fathers are able to visit with their children while they are

incarcerated. In this study, there was a 28% decrease in inmate write-ups for rule-breaking when receiving visits from children. On the other hand, of the 56 caregivers in the Arditti et al. (2003) study, 42.3% reported that their relationship with the child or children had been affected in a negative way by their family member's incarceration. The study participants were "deeply troubled about the effects of incarceration on their children" (p. 200). Some participant comments that were included in the study highlighted children's grief, depression, and irritability, as well as behavioral changes, including "difficulties in school" and "behavioral regression" (p. 201). The collective research findings show that if visits from children benefit their fathers, care should be taken to ensure that the benefits are mutual and extend to the children and their caregivers. Further, the benefits of in person visitation and phone calls for children, adult family members, and soon-to-be-released prisoners may help "set the stage" for a positive and successful reentry.

Employment and Reentry. There are multiple skill sets that are related to employment, such as education, prior work experience, job search skills, onboarding and training skills, and maintaining employment. For reentering individuals, lack of prior experience, time away from the work force, or background checks may pose challenges to employment. In a 2008 study that utilized data from the Urban Institute's longitudinal Returning Home study (n= 740), Visher, et al. uncovered a number of findings that pointed to formerly incarcerated individuals' disadvantaged employment status post-release. While 68% of the respondents worked in the six months prior to their incarceration, only 31% were employed two months post-release. At eight months post-release, 50% were employed; however, 65% had been hired during that period. This indicates that some respondents had difficulty maintaining employment even when they were able to get hired.

Visher, et al. (2008) observed that work during incarceration (53%), such as a work-release program, along with participation in education or job-training programs (65%) while incarcerated had better outcomes. The study did not indicate details about the programming in which the respondents participated (e.g., specific training for a field of work or type of job or general employment skills). The study also did not indicate if the programs used a particular method of instruction or specific curricula.

One qualitative study (Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2019) followed a small cohort (n= 47) of Boston women over a five year period and then interviewed five of the women at ten years to evaluate their employment experiences. All of the women interviewed were found to have structural barriers and gendered legal, economic, and health barriers that made it difficult to obtain and maintain employment. None of the women had been steadily employed over the years of the study.

In other studies, families were found to benefit from a reentering individual's ability to find and maintain employment (Flake, 2015), but the cyclical nature of incarceration-reentry-reincarceration was found to undermine stable employment (Silver et al., 2021). In a one-year study of 122 men and women released from Massachusetts prisons, Western and Sirois (2019) found poverty level wages across the sample, with Black and Hispanic people having the lowest rates of employment and the most severe economic hardship. Reentering individuals who were white had fewer social supports and were more disadvantaged by isolation and addiction, yet they had higher employment rates, which supported a hypothesis of "racialized reentry" (Western & Sirois, 2019, p. 1537). The study illustrated that while incarceration itself is a barrier to employment, structural barriers related to race and class, along with the entrenched ideas and

institutional constraints that are present in the prison setting should be considered for prison reentry.

Institutional constraints related to race and class were also discovered in an ethnographic study in which 16 prison life skills classes were observed, Abrams and Lea (2016) found that while instruction focused on individual motivation and overcoming barriers in reentry, structural barriers such as racial disparities and socioeconomic status were not included. The study also discovered that there was tension between the prison and the inmates, citing "an entrenched institutional discourse that denies rather than affirms the inmate's lived experiences of oppression and institutional marginalization in employment-related and criminal justice system-related experiences" (p. 684). This finding suggests that while prisons might intend to help prisoners by offering life skills learning to support reentry efforts, blind spots related to race, gender, and class exist, and the research did not address their impact.

In a study of 401 reentering male parolees in the Midwest, Berg and Huebner (2011) found that ties to family had clear implications for both job attainment and recidivism. Their research suggested that facilitating job attainment and family ties may "break the cycle of prison to unemployment and thereby stymie the pathway of state dependence leading from prison to reoffending" (p. 405). The researchers recommended strengthening offenders' social connections in order to foster successful job attainment and create a possible path to desistance.

Other studies suggested that shifting employment from an isolated goal to a relational process may prove important for successful reentry: for example, in a study of 148 men with prior felony convictions, Lee and Brown (2022) found a relationship between stigma, career barriers, and career-related self-efficacy. They recommended expanding upon typical career-related interventions (e.g., interviewing skills, resume building) into areas that "address some of

the cognitive, psychological, and interpersonal processes" (p. 7) experienced by someone with a criminal background. It was suggested that this could be done by helping reentering individuals identify and share situations in which they have felt stigmatized and rejected and then process their reactions to the event.

Studies evaluating specific types of job training programs were scarce in the literature. In one study researchers used a randomized control trial (n= 259) that offered intensive job training to half of the participants. The study found that the training program made no difference for violent offenders, but for non-violent offenders, three-year rearrests were 19% lower than the control group which was not given the intensive job skills training (Bollinger & Yelowitz, 2021). The researchers concluded that their "findings on recidivism suggest that the obvious path to improvement in the lives of ex-offenders—as well as the welfare of society at large—runs through the labor market" (p. 1323), suggesting that programming and skills that support obtaining and maintaining employment during incarceration support successful reentry.

Summary and Implications for This Research

The synergistic relationship between themes in the empirical literature and the relational and developmental aspects of the theoretical frameworks highlighted in this review was evident when exploring the literature on this topic in the researchers' findings. Recommendations based on findings from both large-scale and local site research indicate a need to foster familial support, expand access to treatment, remove barriers, support building family bonds and economic opportunities, and support parent-child relationships. Although some of these involve societal shifts in mind frame and actions that are not yet likely and not within the purview of this study, the literature revealed factors that merit attention. Further research is needed to add depth to findings about why some individuals succeed while others do not, to recognize

intersectionality, and to investigate more directly the content of life skills programming and how specific content of courses and programs affect reentry and connections with family and work.

Further, the dependence on recidivism as a primary measure of reentry programming success and collection of large data sets for information about it have created disconnections in the literature about prison programming and reentry focused on outcomes and not individual perceptions of the content and processes of skills learning during incarceration and application of skills and knowledge during reentry. Although smaller-scale studies provided information about what is helpful for individuals post-release, they are limited by scale (e.g., single program; one facility; regional) and/or demographics, with reentering men and fathers more prominently represented in the literature. The LGBTQIA community was not observed in skills programming or reentry literature, with only gender binary, heteronormative individuals, partnerships, and families represented.

In depth information, particularly from the viewpoint of the individual who has been incarcerated, is lacking. Reentering individuals were most often present in the literature in the "third person," as a cog in the criminal justice cycle, a successful or failed outcome of a program or intervention, an individual who had employment challenges or as a risk factor in the life of a child or a partner.

The literature included few first-person interview studies. Nohl's (2015) transformative learning study that is included in the Theoretical Frameworks section of this chapter collected data by conducting first person interviews. These interviews were with adult learners, but not specifically incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals. The interviews aimed to collect data about transformative learning (and any possible disorienting dilemma), not experiences with skills programming.

Potter (2015) stated, “in raising issues of crime and justice regarding marginalized persons, we must advance a critical analysis for the purposes of effecting progressive change” (p. 151). Although recidivism data were used in most studies, first person experiences and giving voice to acknowledge a diverse group of post-incarceration reentering individuals, allowing them to define and describe their experiences with programming, reentry, post-release needs, suggestions and successes were not available to add insight to the findings. There was scant literature about life skills programs and surprisingly few about what aspects of the prison programs were the most helpful, used a specific method of delivery or curriculum; or if they mattered as to why individuals succeeded.

A component of pre-reentry, in-person visits carry financial implications as well as potential problems for the families of prisoners. There are costs associated with travel to the correctional facility, and these costs are more severe for the families of inmates who are placed in facilities far from their homes (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018). In these cases, the additional costs of food, lodging, and childcare expenses are added to basic transportation costs (Comfort, 2007; McKay, Lindquist, et al., 2018; Naser & Visher, 2006). They suggested that while many researchers and policymakers recognized the need for prison visitation that is more family- or child-friendly, this is not yet instituted as common practice in facilities.

The overlapping relationship between prison skills programming, reentry, family relationships, and employment was present in the knowledge and findings of the literature, and theories highlighted in the first section of the review created a framework for understanding the dimensions of the discourse. The “braided” quality of intersectionality that is described by Potter in the intersectionality section (2015, p.152) established an approach to the literature review that embraced the overlap in these relationships and included the individuals, processes, and systems

involved with and impacted by incarceration and reentry. This culminated in a woven foundation of knowledge that informed the method presented in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE: Method

This chapter details the design, method, instruments, and procedures that were used to examine the perceptions of individuals who have been released from prison about what they learned in prison skills programming and the influence this learning has had on the individuals' reentry into family life and employment. The skills areas of focus as defined in Chapter One are: employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management. The study employed a mixed methods design with an explanatory sequential approach that utilized a survey, in-depth interviews, and archival data to explore the following guiding research questions:

1. What reasons do individuals provide for participation or non-participation in skills programming during their incarceration?

2. In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming influences family life and family relationships post release?

3. In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming during incarceration influences their ability to obtain and sustain employment post release?

Design

A mixed methods design was the most appropriate method for the study because this allowed for an explanatory sequential approach. According to Creswell (2015), the intent of this design is "to study a problem by beginning with a quantitative strand to both collect and analyze data, and then to conduct qualitative research to explain the quantitative results" (p. 37). For this study, a survey instrument, the Reentry Experience Survey (RES) was used first to collect

quantitative data, with results expected to inform the qualitative data collection in the interview phase of this study. The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Prison Background Questionnaire (PBQ) informed the development of the RES instrument to expand on specific areas of quantitative results from a national survey and provided a basis for comparison with the RES through its national archival database.

The mixed methods design worked well with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. This study explored prisoners' perceptions of skills education and its influence on reentry, specifically as this relates to reintegration into the family and securing and maintaining employment. Transformative learning, intersectionality, ecological systems, and family adjustment and adaptation were used as conceptual frameworks to explore these perceptions and were threaded throughout the study and relied upon for integration and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2015).

For the interview phase, a phenomenological approach was used. The reasoning for this approach was three-fold: phenomenology is relational, collaborative, and iterative. Van Manen described the phenomenological orientation as a "conversational relation that the researcher develops with the notion he or she wishes to explore and understand" (2016, p. 97) and explained that the conversation is a triad structure of researcher, participant, and phenomenon. There is relationship between the speakers (researcher and participant), and the speakers are "in conversational relation with the notion or the phenomenon that keeps the personal relation of the conversation intact" (2016, p. 98). A phenomenological approach was important for this part of the study because phenomenology recognizes the deep, rich value of the participants' voices and lived experiences.

Through semi-structured interviews and the collaborative quality of a phenomenological approach, my intention was for each participant to become what van Manen (2016) referred to as a "co-investigator of the study" so that they were integral to the work as the data was analyzed and interpreted. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) have described collaboration as a tapestry, where 'the you' as researcher is closely involved with the lived experiences of the participant, and the result of this interwoven movement between researcher, the participants, and the participants' experiences is "a product of both your collaborative efforts" (p. 95). In order to reflect these concepts and incorporate a validity strategy, member checking was offered to participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 274). Individuals who were interviewed were invited to receive a final report of the interview in the Interview Informed Consent Letter (Appendix C) to check for accuracy and comment on the analysis.

The third aspect of phenomenological research that made it an appropriate approach for the qualitative research in this study is its iterative nature. According to Smith et al. (2009), the interview process should be iterative, allowing ideas to "develop and change, both during the process, and then again after a pilot or first interview" (p. 60). An initial interview pilot was completed with colleagues to get feedback and a sense of timing. When participant interviews began, the first interviews provided ideas on how to manage the pacing of the interviews, navigate sensitive subject areas, and optimum pauses for participants to voice their experiences.

This study incorporated triangulation into the research design to add perspective in addressing the research questions. Triangulation here followed Creswell and Creswell's (2020) belief that a study is strengthened when data from different sources are examined and used to build a "coherent justification for themes," and "if themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as

adding to the validity of the study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 222). This study used triangulation in two ways: triangulation of information sources and triangulation of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p.231). First, the study used three sources of data: the RES survey, the data collected from the interviews, and archival PBQ data from a national survey of prisoners. Second, the RES and interviews used multiple methods of data collection and analysis, and this generated qualitative data, quantitative data, and the "combined strengths of both sets of data" (Creswell, 2015, p. 1).

The relational, collaborative, and iterative qualities outlined were important for creating a study that both respected the individuals who participated in the study as well as removed any authoritative or power structuring that would have undermined that respect. Viewing study participants as co-investigators served the dual purpose of: (1) Removing stigma that may be attached to incarcerated individuals and (2) Focusing on collaboration rather than the subject-object orientation that could result in creating an unwanted "otherness" in study participants.

Role of the Researcher

I have spent over a decade working in jails and the justice system in education programming involving skills development with incarcerated and reentering individuals. My experiences have offered many opportunities to observe individuals from diverse backgrounds in different skills programs, some programs that offer straightforward learning and others that provide opportunity for transformative learning and help.

This study was motivated by my curiosity to learn what formerly incarcerated individuals need to know to succeed in reentry, specifically as they reintegrate into their families and seek employment. I recognized the importance of carefully considering my biases throughout. Creswell noted the importance for a researcher to acknowledge how values and beliefs shape

one's orientation to research, how data are gathered, biases brought to the research, and if the researcher sees "investigations as more emerging or fixed" (Creswell, 2015, p. 8). To help keep on track and hold myself accountable, I kept a log throughout data collection and analysis and explored how my values and beliefs interfaced with the research process. A phenomenological approach was selected along with the use of a mixed methods design with triangulation to help counter inadvertent bias by providing several perspectives.

Additionally, I used bracketing as a way to counter bias. Bracketing is a mathematical term that was borrowed by Husserl, the father of phenomenology (Creswell, 2015). The term is used to describe the suspension of "one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (p. 175). I incorporated bracketing by examining potential biases before and after each interview. According to Smith, et al., "questioning at this phase of the project should all be generated by attentive listening to what your participant has to say" (2009, p. 64). Adhering to this, I followed an interview protocol to guide the interview process and to allow participants as much opportunity as possible to speak about their experiences with skills programs and reentry during their interviews.

I did not want to put others or myself at risk, so I conducted interviews by phone to best accommodate reentering individuals who were busy with work and family obligations. This also accommodated those who did not have access to a computer or a private space for video conference. The phone interviews made accommodating participants' busy schedules easier, as well as offered participants the most choice and flexibility for privacy. In doing phone interviews, I was able to protect both interview participants' and my privacy. There are many reasons this was important, including the additional protection of family privacy for those involved in this research.

Setting and Participants

To examine reentering individuals' perceptions of skills programs and how participation in skills programming influences the reentry process, 100 study participants between the ages of 18-74 who were incarcerated in the previous nine years were sought to complete a survey. Plans were made to conduct in-depth interviews with between four and six of the RES survey respondents who met qualifications and expressed interest.

The age range for potential participants was 18-74 reflected the wide age range that correlates with the age range for PBQ data. The time span of release for potential participants was the previous nine years to reflect the latest recidivism data reported by the U.S. Bureau of Justice (bjs.ojp.gov). The use of the longer nine year time span both increased the number of qualifying participants while also capturing data from participants at various points along the reentry timeline, from more recently released individuals to those released years prior to participating. Both life skills program participants and non-participants were invited to participate in the study in order to explore reasons for participation and non-participation.

For the RES, a two-prong sampling approach was used. I reached out to ten professional and personal contacts who work with incarcerated and reentering individuals and requested they forward the survey information and link to clients who qualified and were possibly interested in participating. I also disseminated study recruitment information via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Reddit in order to have broad distribution and generate a more diverse sample and responses (Appendix E).

Since many of my professional and personal contacts reside and work in the same geographical area (New England, specifically Massachusetts and New Hampshire), this two-prong approach used social media to disperse recruitment information nationally, making the

information about this study and survey easy to share with a wider and more diverse group of individuals, increasing the diversity of the sample. Additionally, the use of social media was a way to interact directly with potential participants, rather than recruiting solely through individuals who were working with formerly incarcerated individuals. It was thought that the use of social media may have increased feelings of comfort and safety for participants to respond to the RES privately. Throughout the recruitment process, I made it clear that individuals were only eligible to participate in the study if they were free and had been released from incarceration within the last nine years.

Data Collection

In addition to accessing archival data from the PBQ, this study used two instruments. The RES, a survey that was developed for this study and informed by the PBQ. The second instrument, the interview protocol, expanded upon the RES in order to deepen and enrich the inquiry in a private, one-on-one setting with interview participants.

Instruments

Survey. A survey targeted at gathering data about former inmates' experiences with and perceptions about skills programming was needed for the study. Several surveys that have been used nationally with current and former prisoners were examined and considered but lacked specific questions essential for exploring the guiding research questions in this study.

The United States Department of Justice distributes multiple surveys to inmates and reentering individuals to collect demographic, employment, and recidivism data: The National Inmate Survey, The Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, and the National Former Prisoner Survey (bjs.ojp.gov). While these surveys have demographic questions, they do not include detailed questions about skills programs, individuals' relationships with learning, and

perceptions about how skills programs have influenced reentry. Therefore, they were not useful for the purposes of this research study.

Between 2001 and 2006, the Urban Institute conducted the Returning Home Study (urban.org). A pre-release survey was used with inmates who then participated in multiple interviews post-release. This multistate study focused on education and skills, reentry, and family support, but did not target skills programs or former inmates' perceptions about how their participation in skills programs influenced family and employment. Thus, this survey was not suitable for this study.

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is a long running study that began in 2012. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the goal of PIAAC is to "assess and compare the basic skills and the broad range of competencies of adults around the world. The assessment focuses on cognitive and workplace skills needed for successful participation in 21st-century society and the global economy" (nces.ed.gov). My interest in PIAAC grew after discovering that the United States portion of the assessment included a segment about prisoners. This segment of the assessment used a survey instrument called the Prison Background Questionnaire (PBQ). This instrument contains questions to gather demographics as well as questions about prison skills programming and an individual's relationship with learning.

I reached out to PIAAC administrators Holly Xie, the PIAAC Program Officer at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in Washington, D.C., and Emily Pawlowski, Research Associate at American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Arlington, Virginia. I met with Holly Xie and Emily Pawlowski on May 11, 2021 to discuss the PBQ survey instrument. Through this meeting and follow up emails, I was granted permission to use the PBQ questions

to design my RES survey instrument (E. Pawlowski, Personal Communication, May 18, 2021) (Appendix F). With support and permission, I adapted the survey questions that aligned with this study to be used for individuals post-release. There are 30 questions, 14 content questions and 16 demographic questions. The RES consists of open ended and closed ended questions focused on the respondent's experience with prison skills programming. The response categories were limited in the RES in order to compare the data from this study with PBQ data.

The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and provided a link at the end of the survey to email me an individual's interest in participation in an interview. If a respondent chose to participate in an interview, there was not a trace or connection to the RES. Qualtrics (Qualtrics.com) was used for RES distribution and data collection.

Interview Protocol. In keeping with a phenomenological approach, the interview phase of the study included a protocol developed to be semi-structured to allow participants to answer questions as personally and thoroughly as possible. The protocol had ten questions and was used as a guiding instrument. The ten questions were based on the research questions and the RES. In keeping with a phenomenological approach, the questions were open ended and intended to encourage expansion and detail.

The interview questions were piloted with two individuals who work with incarcerated and reentering individuals to get feedback and to gauge the time it took for someone to answer each question. I invited feedback on the interview questions to see if there was a need to add, revise, or eliminate a question.

Archival PBQ Data. The latest PIAAC PBQ (2014) was administered at 98 prison facilities. Eighty of the prisons were men's' or coed facilities and 18 were women's prisons. The PBQ collected data from 1,315 incarcerated individuals, 1,048 men and 267 women.

Data Collection Procedures

This study used three sources of data: (a) the RES survey, (b) interviews, and (c) archival data from the United States' Program for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Prison Background Questionnaire (PBQ). The purpose of using the PBQ was to compare my results with the data collected in a large, longitudinal national study, and to see how data collected in the interview phase might explain my RES data as well as PBQ survey data.

Before the survey began, the participant was asked to read a letter of informed consent that preceded the survey. This letter explained the study, the participant's role, my role as researcher, confidentiality, and contact information for myself and the Lesley University Internal Review Board if there were questions or problems. RES participants were required to read, agree to, and electronically sign the letter of informed consent before completing the survey.

At the end of the RES, respondents were asked if they were interested in participating in a follow up phone interview. If they were, they had the opportunity to click on a link to a confidential email address that I set up that was used solely for the purpose of interview connections.

Phone interviews with participants who met the criteria and expressed interest in an interview were scheduled at mutually agreed upon times. Interviews were conducted in English and took approximately one hour. The interview questions related to RES questions as well as the research questions. Interviews were conducted using Google Voice with a phone number that I set up and used solely for the purpose of interviews.

The administrators at the National Center for Educational Statistics International Data Explorer (IDE) invited me to access PIAAC data by using the IDE tool that provides access to

PBQ data that related to the survey questions to compare response means and categories (E. Pawlowski, Personal Communication, May 18, 2021).

Data Management

All RES data were stored anonymously within the Qualtrics software program and accessed only on my password protected computer. The Qualtrics platform requires a separate password to access the data so a double password was required for analysis. All interviews were audio recorded using Google Voice with an additional digital recording device as a backup. Audio files were transferred to the same password protected computer. Interview audio files were transcribed using Temi (www.temi.com) software, which also required a separate password to access user account. The interview transcripts were printed for analysis and all printed materials were shredded because the data are being kept in password coded digital storage. All participants' data are held confidentially.

Data Analysis

The Qualtrics data analysis software and excel were selected for use in analyzing the quantitative data from the RES. For the brief open-ended survey questions, responses were read, categorized, and analyzed for common themes. The themes that emerged from the open-ended survey responses were compared with interview data analysis and information from the PIAAC national database.

Recorded interviews were transcribed using Temi speech-to-text transcription software (www.temi.com). After transcribing all interviews, the transcripts were printed and the recordings were listened to while the text was read. A process of initial noting in which narratives that could "bind certain sections of an interview together" were sought along with areas with "richer and more detailed sections or indeed contradictions and paradoxes" (Smith, et

al., 2009, p. 82). The data was analyzed for meaning that revealed themes by using Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) analytic process, led to the discovery of emerging themes across the interview data.

This initial coding process was conducted by using three different colored pens (Smith, et al., 2009). The interview transcripts were read for descriptive comments (key words and phrases), linguistic comments (pauses, laughter, tone, and fluency), and conceptual comments (interpretation and understanding of the data), and the three-part noting of the transcripts began to expose themes in the data. The color-coded three-part noting was conducted with the understanding that each iteration contributed to the themes and richness and depth of meaning. To further code and analyze data from the interview transcripts, the Delve software application was used (www.delvetool.com). This allowed interview transcripts to be searched, coded, and organized within the application. My final step of analysis, once a set of themes emerged from the data and was correlated to transcript text, was to identify connections between the themes. Once themes and connections were identified, the findings were contextualized and viewed in relation to the research questions.

The PBQ archival data was used as a point of comparison with the results of these analyses. Smith, et al. (2009) described the hermeneutic circle as when "the part is interpreted in relation to the whole; the whole is interpreted in relation to the part" (p. 95). The data collected from the RES, the interviews, and the PBQ archival data each played a role in the explanatory research process, providing richer, deeper meaning with each iteration of analysis.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited to former inmates who were incarcerated in the United States within the previous nine years. A 9-year release period was chosen to reflect the Bureau of

Justice 2018 research and report on prisoner recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice, “a 9-year follow-up period shows a much fuller picture of offending patterns and criminal activity of released prisoners than prior studies that used a 3- or 5-year follow-up period” (bjs.ojp.gov).

The interview segment of this study was conducted over the phone for reasons of flexibility, accessibility, and safety. Phone interviews allowed for scheduling flexibility, particularly with participants who were working and had family responsibilities and made it possible to interview participants subjects who lived in other parts of the country. They did not require the extra travel time, transportation and/or environmental logistics (e.g., access to buildings, privacy of interview space) of an in-person interview. Interviewing by phone was also the best technological option for accessibility as it did not require a personal computer, access to or comfort with Zoom or other video conferencing platforms, or the private and quiet space needed for recording an interview. Finally, as the Covid-19 pandemic has continued, phone interviews provided the highest level of health and safety without the restrictions of masks and social distancing. There may have been a loss of information because there was not an opportunity to observe nonverbal behaviors; however, safety was the overriding factor in setting this delimitation.

Age was a delimiting factor in this study. This study did not include the juvenile justice system, and the age range for qualifying participants was 18-74 because this was the age range of the PBQ, the foundation for the RES survey and interview protocol instruments that were used. This age range was close to the ranges of “age 18-21” spanning to “over age 65” used in data collection by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (bop.gov). The use of a similar age range offered comparison between these instruments and data collected in this study.

This dissertation focused on the following skills areas, as defined in Chapter One: employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management. These areas were selected with recognition that narrowing the range of phenomena would contribute to learning about the meaning of participants' experiences in more depth. Thus, the study did not include all the possible educational, vocational, rehabilitation and treatment programs offered in a prison setting. For example, adult basic education, English as a second language, high school equivalency preparation, or other academic programs were not incorporated into the research design; nor were specific vocational training programs, such as carpentry, HVAC, or tailoring. Clinical rehabilitation programs for substance abuse, mental health treatment programs, and treatment programs for sex offenders were not included because individuals' mental health was not a primary focus of this study.

Trustworthiness

Several measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness. These related to the study participants, the researcher, and the collection and storage of data. Efforts were made to provide transparency and establish trust with participants. The RES survey instrument outlined the purpose of the study and provided information about confidentiality and Lesley University contact information for respondents to ask questions or report concerns. This information was given and agreed to by respondents who provided their informed consent before the start of the survey. The RES instrument was anonymous and did not require any identifying information from respondents.

Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms and their confidentiality was protected through the use of security measures and password protection in order to maintain the privacy of each participant. A letter of informed consent outlining the purpose of the study and

confidentiality was presented to, discussed with, and signed by interview participants before data were collected. Like RES respondents, Interview participants were given Lesley University contact information to ask questions or report concerns. Interview participants were invited to ask questions or clarify any aspect of the study before beginning their interviews and at any time throughout the interview process. Both RES respondents and interview participants were assured that they could leave the study at any time. Interview participants were offered member checking as a part of the study.

In order to engage in the iterative nature of qualitative inquiry, the interviews were recorded using the Google Voice application and transcribed using Temi software (www.temi.com). The use of this technology allowed them to be listened to, read, and annotated multiple times over the course of data analyses. This process was complemented by the use of a research log. This was used by the researcher throughout each iteration of data collection and analysis to record facts, reflect on and note what transpired, remain open, and adhere to the promises made to participants and ethical standards in research.

Chapter Summary

This study used a mixed methods design to explore how individuals who have been released from prison perceive learning in prison skills programs focused on employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting, life skills, and anger management and the influence this learning may have had on their reentry experiences. This chapter described the design, methods, and procedures used to conduct the study and analyze data and provided the rationale for employing phenomenology for qualitative inquiry. The results of this exploration and analysis are presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

This mixed-methods study examined the lived experiences of individuals who participated in skills programming during incarceration and who have been released from prison to reenter into their families and employment. The skills learning programs of focus are: employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management as defined in Chapter One. This chapter begins with Section 1, a brief review of the data collection and analyses processes including necessary adjustments that were approved by the IRB. Section 2 presents demographic information about the twelve interview participants in the study. Section 3 reports eight findings which are organized by each of the guiding research questions:

1. What reasons do individuals provide for participation or non-participation in skills programming during their incarceration? (Finding 1, 2, and 3)

2. In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming influences family life and family relationships post release? (Finding 4 and 5)

3. In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming during incarceration influences their ability to obtain and sustain employment post release? (Finding 6 and 7)

Pertinent information from the study survey and applicable archival data the PIAAC PBQ are presented in Section 3. The last finding (Finding 8) crosses all research questions and is listed at the end of the section. This finding presents the themes that emerged from the participants' interview responses when they were asked to describe characteristics of their imagined or wished for prison skills program: "If you were asked to design a skills program for jail or prison, what

would your main goal of the program be? What would the most important topics be? Could you describe how you think those topics would be helpful for you or others? How would you set your program up?" Participants provided suggestions for social-emotional development, practical skills, and programming that targets an individual's specific areas of need. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Section 1: Review of Data Collection and Changes to Method

In order to gather the data to answer the guiding research questions, it was necessary to make a revision to method. The intention was for the anonymous Qualtrics RES to produce data from 100 respondents and to generate interest in further participation in an individual interview. Because of an unexpected small percentage of return in the RES (n=10), there was a need to switch the reliance from survey to interview. Although the RES data were insufficient for full quantitative analysis, the ten responses nevertheless were considered value-added and potentially worthy of inclusion. Thus, the data were hand-analyzed to include the survey results informally. In so doing, an addendum to the study proposal to accommodate the need to shift emphasis to the qualitative design dimension was approved by the IRB.

The revision to method deepened the interview process and used an expanded interview protocol which incorporated RES points that addressed the guiding research questions. The expanded protocol also added cues that were used to guide the interview process. Since formal comparative analysis with the national PBQ results was also affected by the loss of survey results, topic areas of interest relevant to the PBQ were also factored into the interview questions. The number of interview participants was expanded from the originally proposed 4-6 to twelve. Interview participants learned of this study through their participation in the RES, from social media posts, and through a modified snowball method, by word of mouth from other

participants and those working in reentry and related fields. Otherwise, the participant characteristics described in Chapter Three remained the same.

The interviews were transcribed using TEMI transcription software (www.temi.com) and coded using Delve coding software (www.delvetool.com). To facilitate descriptions of and quotations from the participants' experiences, repeated words or expressions such as "um," "like," and "I mean" were omitted from the interviews for clarity. Section 2 provides further information on the twelve individuals who participated in the study.

Section 2: Participant Demographics

Although the primary focus is on the interview participants, this section also includes information about those who participated in the RES.

Interview

Twelve individuals who were formerly incarcerated participated in in-depth interviews for the study. In order to protect each participant's identity, pseudonyms were assigned and are used throughout the dissertation. While nine of the participants were incarcerated in New England facilities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, three served prison sentences in other areas of the U.S. in the states of Texas, Indiana, and Michigan. The amount of time participants served during their most recent incarceration ranged from two months in a diversion pre-release center to 27 years in federal prison. Five of the participants had been released from incarceration for less than one year at the time of interview, while others had experienced longer-term reentry: two for 2-3 years, four for 3-5 years, and 1 participant who had been living in the community for over 5 years. Refer to Table 1 for information on participants' most recent incarcerations.

Table 1

Information About Participants' Most Recent Incarcerations

Participant	Facility State	Type of Facility	Type of Charges (M=Misdemeanor; F=Felony)	Length of Sentence	Time Since Release
Amy	TX	State Prison	Embezzlement (F)	12 years	0-1 year
Britney	NH	County Jail	Drug Related (M)	6 months	3-5 years
Christine	NH	County Jail	Drug Related (F)	1 year	0-1 year
Deborah	MA	Pre-Release	Drug Related (n/a)	2 months	0-1 year
Jim	MA	County Jail	Domestic Assault (M)	2 years	2-3 years
Michelle	NH	County Jail	Drug Related (F)	1 year	2-3 years
Mitch	MA	County Jail	Assault (F)	2 years	3-5 years
Pete	IN	Federal Prison	Drug Related (F)	12 years	3-5 years
Randy	MA	County Jail	Assault (F)	10 months	3-5 years
Ron	MI	Federal Prison	Conspiracy (F)	27 years	0-1 year
Tim	NH	State Prison	Drug Related (F)	5 years	5+ years
Tracy	NH	County Jail	Drug Related (F)	2 years	0-1 year

Note. As previously noted, all names were changed to pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy.

Note. "n/a" is used for Deborah's charges due to incarceration in a diversion-style treatment program, released for further treatment and not formally charged.

In order to provide a wide range of background and experience, diversity was desired in the sample. As a part of the interview process, participants were asked, "how do you identify yourself?" Seven of the participants identified their race as White, and one identified as Hispanic. Four individuals identified themselves as Black, and one identified as Hispanic. One participant identified both racially and ethnically as "Middle Eastern."

When asked, "how do you identify yourself?" four identified as cisgender females and one as transgender female. Six participants identified as male, and one identified as nonbinary. Eight participants identified themselves as heterosexual, two as bisexual, one as lesbian, and one as gay. The ages of participants ranged from 26 to 48 years of age. Table 2 provides demographic details for each study participant.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender/ Gender Expression C=Cisgender T=Transgender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Race	Ethnicity
Amy	Female (C)	Bisexual	43	White	not given
Britney	Female (T)	Bisexual	"30s"	White	not given
Christine	Female (C)	Heterosexual	33	White	Hispanic
Deborah	Nonbinary	Lesbian	43	Black	not given
Jim	Male (C)	Gay	48	White	not given
Michelle	Female (C)	Heterosexual	35	Black	Hispanic
Mitch	Male (C)	Heterosexual	26	Black	not given
Pete	Male (C)	Heterosexual	48	White	not given
Randy	Male (C)	Heterosexual	28	Black	not given
Ron	Male (C)	Heterosexual	47	Middle Eastern	Middle Eastern
Tim	Male (C)	Heterosexual	45	White	not given
Tracy	Female (C)	Heterosexual	32	White	not given

Section 3: Research Question Findings

Findings for Research Question #1: What reasons do individuals provide for participation or non-participation in skills programming during their incarceration?

Finding #1. *Participants reported self-improvement, having something to do, and connection to others as reasons for skills program participation.*

Self-Improvement. Six participants reported that self-improvement was a main reason for participation in skills programming, and four of the six were women. Amy, a 43-year-old woman who served a 12-year sentence in prison, talked about learning in prison as an opportunity for positive change. She described herself and the women that she was incarcerated with as "people who make mistakes and want to do better." By contrast Tracy's two-year sentence was much

shorter, but she reported that when she became involved in programming she “felt like things really improved.” Britney, who served six months for misdemeanor drug charges shared that programming helped her “get over old self-consciousness” so she could “scoop up opportunity.” Lastly, Michelle said that she thought that program participation was about getting to “do positive things.”

Mitch and Pete were the men who reported self-improvement as a reason for participating in skills programs, with Mitch serving a two-year jail sentence and Pete serving a 12-year prison sentence. Mitch shared that he saw programs as a way that he “could decide to change.” Pete talked about self-improvement through education, sharing that he wanted to educate himself, and adding, “everyone in federal prison wants to better themselves.” In addition to being involved in an employment readiness skills program while incarcerated, Pete also earned his Bachelor of Arts degree. He shared that as a part of his self-improvement and self-education he loved to read: “I never put a book down. I read books all the time. I probably read 10,000 books. I would read the directions to a can opener if I didn't have another option.”

“Something To Do” The six participants in this section spoke about how, in general, their experiences with incarceration included a negative environment, boredom, lack of routine, and limited activities to fill the time. In order to counteract this, the participants talked about searching for “something to do” as a reason for their involvement in skills programming.

Both Michelle and Mitch directly talked about the boredom that accompanies incarceration. Mitch said, “when you're incarcerated, you just kind of need a routine, you know, you need something to do**.** When you wake up and you don't do nothing, it's boring. It's just the same thing every day.” Michelle cited boredom as her “number one” reason for program

participation, saying, “there’s not a lot to do so it was kind of nice to have something to look forward to.”

Filling idle time or the idea that something is better than nothing was another factor in participants’ reasons for taking part in skills programming. Tim said, “I probably would’ve taken any class available just because it was something to do.” Christine responded similarly, saying, “I really would’ve done anything. It was just a matter of having something to do.”

One participant, Jim, responded that the desire to fill time with something to do served additional purposes during incarceration as well. This included a respite from a housing unit to a space that was better, safer, or more positive. Being a married gay father made Jim feel he was a “duck out of water” during his incarceration. He shared,

> I was excited just to have something to do. I was hoping to get off that unit. It was really hard to find things to do. The unit I was housed on was for people with anger management issues and for people with domestic violence charges and assault charges…So anything to get me to do something else. And you know, I love learning. I was looking for something to keep my mind sharp.

Britney also expressed the viewpoint that taking opportunities to leave the unit was positive: “even just to get off the unit to have something to do, to keep busy.”

Connection to Others. Five participants listed connection to others as a reason for participation in skills programming. They spoke about their perceptions that while incarcerated, peers viewed involvement with skills programming as positive. Britney shared that “people doing something was looked at positive by everybody.” Similarly, Michelle said that “ninety percent” of the unit on which she was incarcerated was “very supportive.” She shared, “we were all in the same boat. There weren’t very many of us on the unit and I think most people wanted

to see each other do positive things." Some participants focused on the community and camaraderie that can develop when people feel connected and that they are in "the same boat."

When it came to participation in available programs on Tracy's unit, "we all really supported each other… Everyone would give each other tips on what we could do to improve, so I felt like it was really supportive among the women that were in the program." In addition to support from other women on her unit, Amy spoke about her fellow inmates' participation in programs as a reason to celebrate: "They would get excited for one another. If somebody came back and said, 'I got into this class,' or 'I'm starting college,' or 'I'm in this vocational' it would be a reason for a celebration—It would be excitement!"

Jim spoke about connection to others as finding "like-minded people" in the parenting classes he took. As a gay dad with a son and a husband, Jim suspected that it was difficult for others in his parenting program to relate to him, but he did feel strongly that he could relate to them as a partner and a father.

Finding #2. *Participants reported lack of program availability and limited access to programs as reasons for non-participation.*

All twelve participants reported experience with skills programming in at least one of the five focus skills as defined in Chapter One: Employment Readiness, Reentry Preparation, Parenting, Life Skills, and Anger Management. There were no interviewees who were "non-participants" in skills programming altogether. Five participants-- Deborah, Michelle, Jim, Randy, and Ron--participated in more than one skills program in the five areas of focus. Participant responses regarding the availability of programs and the ways they learned about accessing programs at their facilities were used to explore reasons of access and availability that interview participants gave for a lack of program involvement across the five focus areas.

Results show that eight participants were involved in life skills programming, four in both parenting and in anger management, and three in employment readiness. Despite representation of four different types of facilities (a pre-release program, county jail, state prison, and federal prison) across five different states, none of the participants reported that they were offered or involved in a reentry preparation class or program. Table 3 shows skills programming areas and the number of participants who reported experiences in each. Although the sample was small, it is helpful to know the percentages of participants who were involved in each area of programming.

Table 3

Participants Who Reported Experiences With Skills Programming Areas

Skills Programming Areas	Number of Participants Reporting Involvement
Employment Readiness	3 (25%)
Reentry Preparation	0 (0%)
Parenting	4 (33%)
Life Skills	8 (66%)
Anger Management	4 (33%)

Note. Numbers exceed 12 participants because five participants had experiences with multiple programs.

Access and availability. Two participants—Michelle and Jim—discussed limited program availability and access. Both felt that these limitations caused them to value learning opportunities. Michelle said that the limited learning opportunities that she experienced while incarcerated changed that way she perceived things, sharing, “when you’re in a place where there’s such limited opportunity for pretty much everything, it changes the way you see the world…You see everything as opportunity when you’re not living in such a strict and restrained

kind of environment." Jim had a similar response to Michelle, saying that once released from jail, "I wanted to take some opportunities that maybe I wouldn't have paid as much attention to in the past. I think I'm more grateful for the opportunities that are available not being incarcerated."

Three participants--Tim, Pete, and Michelle--mentioned that the available programs were announced using flyers on a bulletin board on their units. Three--Michelle, Randy, and Jim--also noted that in addition to posted notices some programs were announced by a staff visitor to the unit to solicit signups. With regard to having a staff person solicit for potential program participants, Jim said, "when somebody comes onto the unit, everybody gets really excited. It's like having company in a way; you see the same inmates and the same officers all the time."

Tim described a dearth of programming when he served a five-and-a-half-year sentence in northern New Hampshire. He recalled that his incarcerating facility offered a life skills-based substance abuse program, a GED program, and a woodshop program. Because all of Tim's arrests and incarcerations were related to substance misuse, he participated in the substance abuse treatment group. He also took part in the wood shop program but did not participate in the GED program because he had already obtained his GED at the time of his incarceration. Tim stated that reentry classes, a parenting program, or an anger management program were not available at the facility where he was incarcerated, so he did not have the opportunity to attend them.

Two participants, Ron and Amy, represent the longest incarcerated male and female of the study's sample. Ron served 27 years (2020 release) in a federal prison in Michigan, and Amy served 12 years (2021 release) in a Texas state prison. Amy shared that she and other women learned about available programs in three ways: word of mouth, a written request for

information, and through a prison newspaper. Word of mouth happened when women shared that they were involved with programs or had heard about classes or programs that were available. The second was to write to the education department to request information or to sign up for a program. The third way that program information was available was in a prison-wide newspaper. Amy noted that this newspaper was distributed to both the men's and women's facilities, but programming was not equitable between the men and women:

> There's a prison wide newspaper and it goes to the men's and the women's unit. And we would get it on the women's unit and see all of these programs that were offered to the men that are just not made available to the women.

The participant with the shortest length of sentence, Deborah, served two months. Her incarceration was part of a substance use diversion program that took place at a men's jail. She also noted a lack of program availability for women. She explained that psychoeducational groups focused on recovery from drugs and alcohol were built in to her program, but other skills programming, such as those from the study's five focus areas, were not. Deborah shared that because of the short-term nature of the unit, "we were kind of closed off to the rest of the facility and some of those services that they provided for the men." A teacher from the larger male facility would visit for parenting and life skills programming, but it was less formal:

> The parenting class, I think was six weeks long. One of the women that worked in the male part of the facility came over to teach us that…she would come once a week and bring all of the materials that she used with the men, but we adapted it to be a class focused on mothers which I think is very different than the dads.

Ron explained that he experienced changes that took place over time, with program flyers posted at the prison library being replaced by postings on a secure, in-house prison computer

system as that technology became available. When he talked about the ways that information about skills programs was disseminated in the prison, Ron also described a prison programming practice in which inmates would be admitted to a program according to their release date:

> It goes by your release date. So technically because of my sentence, I literally would have never taken that class, except for the fact that the psychologist for the program, maybe about 15 years after I was on the wait list, she called me down one day. She said, “we're gonna do this for you,” she goes, “look, you you've been on this wait list for years. I'm tired of even looking at your name, so next week you're starting this class.”

Ron estimated that his name got on the waiting list for the program in 1996 during the early part of his lengthy sentence and finally took the class “in 2010 or 2011.”

Amy participated in an employment readiness program that taught female inmates skills that would help them to work in hospitality services. She was interested in this program only because it was the only one available, stating, “that's the only program that they offered at the unit that I was on, so I took it.” Amy had a similar experience to what Ron described:

> They actually didn't want to let me in that because my sentence was kind of large. And they tried to keep that for people that are going home within two years, but I convinced her because I wrote her several times and told her, “I just know I'm gonna make parole! I know my projected release date isn't until 10 years from now, but I see parole in two years and I'm gonna, make it.” So that's how they, she ended up letting me in…And of course, I didn't make parole.

Interestingly, Amy was charged tuition for her program, although after her release she did not work in hospitality services or find the program useful in obtaining or maintaining employment during her reentry. Despite participant reports highlighting the challenges with access and

availability of programming, results show that participants considered their learning to be transformative, as presented in the following section, Finding #3.

Finding #3. *Participants reported that their experiences with learning skills during incarceration was transformative.*

When asked, "How has your experience with incarceration changed the way you approach learning?" seven of the 12 participants spoke about learning in skills programming as transformative, creating changes in the ways they had previously thought, felt, or behaved. This was revealed in participant responses which were focused on three areas: the development of specific skills, views on the process of learning, and, finally, views on learning outcomes.

Skills Development. Jim, Deborah, and Mitch all focused on the ways their experiences with skills programming changed them. These changes included the development of specific skills that were beneficial to their reentry and in their personal experiences and relationships. Jim was in his early forties when he was incarcerated for two years on domestic charges after a fight with his husband. During his incarceration he participated in two programs: an anger management program that was required on the unit that he was placed on due to his domestic assault charges, and a parenting program that was voluntary and required a sign-up. Jim shared that his experiences with these programs helped him develop skills that help him change his outlook on life's difficulties. Jim said, "it definitely changed me. It definitely made me take something very negative and figure out a way through learning something new and trying something new to look at the negative and make it into a positive." Some of these positive transformations included gaining focus and a sense of control and a way to set goals and begin working on them: "I was able to change, see it as a time to get myself together and reevaluate things and to set some goals for myself and, even in jail, to start working towards those goals."

Incarcerated for two months in a substance use disorder diversion unit, Deborah was offered life skills and parenting programming to teach healthy coping skills as an alternative to the misuse of alcohol and/or drugs. Deborah shared,

> I had to learn about addiction. I had to learn about what it means to have a substance use disorder. I had to learn about how my past is part of the decisions that I make today. It has definitely changed me for the better it has made me more patient and probably more kind and definitely a better listener as well.

This segment of Deborah's interview was not edited because of the declarative and impactful nature of her response.

Like Deborah, Mitch referenced his decision making when he discussed how he had changed after he participated in anger management and life skills programs. Twenty-six years old at the time of his interview, Mitch was the youngest of the participants. He was incarcerated for two years at the age of 20 for assault charges. When asked about his learning in skills programs Mitch said,

> I'm growing. I'm glad I'm changing, glad I'm not this old Mitch. I used to get mad if someone said something to me the wrong way, I beat him up! Now I think five steps ahead. I think about my job.

Mitch mentioned journaling as a specific skill that he learned while he was incarcerated and has utilized during his reentry. This supported his change:

> Someone says something in the wrong was, like your boss gets mad, screams at you or whatever, write it down. If you need that job that bad, write it down, boom, take it and look at it for what it is.

Learning skills and then practicing those skills on his own enabled Mitch to make behavioral change and gain the ability to "think five steps ahead."

Views on the Process of Learning. Two participants, Tracy and Tim, referenced transformative learning in regard to their experiences with the process of learning. These participants were both incarcerated on drug-related charges but had different experiences in terms of sentence length and the time that has passed since their releases. Tracy was released from a two-year jail sentence less than one year ago while Tim served a longer prison sentence of five and a half years. Tim was released nine years ago and has been living and working in his community since then. In addition to taking adult education classes and earning her GED while incarcerated, Tracy participated in a life skills program that focused on financial literacy. She described her early learning compared with after her participation in skills programming. Tracy said, "I never used to ask a question about anything. I was so nervous and scared to ask for help." Once she experienced learning in her prison programming, this changed:

> I learned through my teachers that it's okay for me to ask a question and ask for clarification, ask for help. And nothing bad is gonna come of that. It actually shows that I'm interested and it's a good thing, but I didn't know that I that's something new to me. So, that really changed the way I learn. I'm less afraid to ask questions now.

Tim referred to the way that his approach to learning changed after his incarcerations. He talked about a change that occurred as a result of his incarceration, his recovery from substance misuse, and his experiences learning life skills, sharing that before this change occurred, "I wasn't even trying really." Relying on listening and observing other people, he said that he "was able to get outta my own way and to sit down and actually try to study and actually try to read and retain stuff." Tim also observed that for him "hands on learning was very helpful because it

got me to do the thing I was trying to learn." He noted that experiential learning is helpful because his reading skills are still developing: "Even though I can read and comprehend, I still struggle because it's still a new scope for me, even though it's twenty years old, it's still fairly new. Most people my age have been doing it for 40-50 years."

Views on Learning Outcomes. In addition to highlighting some of the changes to learning, participants also spoke about how their involvement with skills programming changed how they perceive the results or outcomes of learning. Related to Michelle and Jim's comments about opportunity in the Access and Availability section of Finding #2, Amy shared that she now sees learning as an opportunity not to be missed:

> It changed. I won't take it for granted. I think before I felt like everything was just kind of at my fingertips and it wasn't such a big deal, but now I realize that it absolutely is a big deal to have any little opportunity. And it makes me want to jump for opportunities instead of kind of thinking about it, or having it run around in my brain for years at a time, it makes me think, "okay, I need to act now!"

Amy shared that through her learning experiences during her incarceration, she began to see that learning is related to achievement: "now when I think about learning new things, it just, it really makes me feel like I could accomplish something."

Study RES Information for Research Question #1. The study RES that was used to inform the interview questions and prompts asked about participation and included specific questions about the respondents' reasons for attending the following programs: Employment Readiness, Reentry Classes, Parenting, Life Skills, and Anger Management. Nine of the ten RES respondents answered the survey questions about the five programming areas.

The RES results were consistent with the results of the interviews. Of the five skills programming areas, employment readiness and reentry classes yielded the lowest participation results, with zero of nine respondents reporting attendance in employment readiness programming and one of nine reporting attendance in a reentry class. The three remaining programming areas, parenting, life skills, and anger management had more participants: Three of nine participated in a parenting program, five of nine in a life skills program, and two of nine in an anger management program.

The RES included a section about learning. Consistent with interview results, the majority of survey respondents answered that they like learning new things, that incarceration has motivated their learning, and that their learning was transformative. Six of eight individuals responding to the prompt "I think I have changed by learning new things" responded "this describes me perfectly." Table 4 details the results from survey responses about learning.

Table 4

Participants' RES Responses to Prompts About Perceptions of Learning

Survey Likert Scale Prompts about Learning	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	This describes me perfectly	Number of responses
When I hear or read about new ideas, I try to relate them to real life situations	0%	13%	38%	50%	8
I like learning new things	0%	11%	11%	78%	9
When I come across something new, I try to relate it to what I already know	0%	0%	22%	78%	9
My experience with incarceration has motivated me to learn	0%	13%	38%	50%	8
I think I have changed by learning new things	0%	0%	25%	75%	8

Also consistent with interview results, the most frequent reason given for non-participation in skills programming was that a particular program "was not offered" or the

participant “was not eligible.” Table 5 shows the results about program participation from the nine respondents of the RES below.

Table 5

Skills Programming Participation and Non-Participation Results for RES Participants

Skills Programming Area	# of Participants (n = 10)	# of Non-Participants	
		Program "was not offered"	Participant "was not eligible"
Employment Readiness	0	8	1
Reentry	1	7	1
Parenting	3	3	3
Life Skills	5	3	1
Anger Management	2	4	3

PIAAC PBQ Archived Results Related to Research Question #1. The PIAAC PBQ included 1,315 incarcerated participants in its latest 2014 survey. While the focus of PIAAC is on literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills, archival PIAAC PBQ results include information about participation and non-participation in employment readiness programming, called “job training.” This included results for participation and non-participation. Of 1,315 participants, 23% reported they had participated in employment readiness programming. Sixty percent listed “self-improvement” as the reason for participation and 43 percent listed “to increase the chances of getting a job when released” (participants were able to choose multiple responses).

Thirty percent of respondents did not participate in employment readiness programming. Forty-one percent were “not eligible” or “did not meet qualifications” for participation in this

programming. Thirty-seven percent answered “other” with a majority of write-in responses explaining that employment readiness was “not offered.” Nineteen percent answered “not interested” and three percent reported that they were “on a waitlist.”

Although PIAAC only provided results for one of the skills programming areas of focus, the information is consistent with this study’s interview and survey results for reason for participation and non-participation. PIAAC PBQ does not include survey materials or results that relate specifically to transformative learning.

Findings for Research Question #2: In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming influences family life and family relationships post release?

Finding #4. *Participants experienced relationship losses during incarceration.*

There were four loss themes that appeared in the participants’ interview responses. All themes connected to relationships:

- Four of twelve participants discussed losses in relationships with the participants’ families of origin (e.g., parents and siblings).
- Seven of the twelve participants described losses of parenting, and/or co-parenting relationships.
- Half (6) of the participants discussed the loss of romantic partnerships.
- Two participants described a loss of self/ their own identity during the time of incarceration.

Participants spoke about losing their role as a mother or father, by either taking on a “lesser” role than a parent such as a family member or a friend. This was often due to the participants’ addictions, criminal behavior, and loss of freedom affecting their access to their

children and the subsequent loss of time with their children. Participants described feeling stigmatized by having served time in jail or prison. These losses stemmed from participants being removed from their environment, changes in relationship dynamics, health related changes, and lastly, death.

Losses in the Family of Origin. Mitch described a shift in his relationship with his mother as a result of his incarceration that left him feeling as if he had lost the former connection they had. He said:

> A lot of times my mom might say, "oh, I helped you when you were in jail," and it's like, "you didn't! You didn't help me!" Others just want to feel good about themselves, but they didn't help you with the stuff you saw in jail and things you go through.

Although Mitch still maintained a relationship with his mother at the time of his interview, he described it as "hard."

Because of the length of Ron's 27-year incarceration, he lost a tremendous amount of time with his mother, and she was not able to see him develop into adulthood as a free man. Ron recognized this loss and credited his mother as being the reason he focused on participating in prison programming and his personal growth during his sentence. Ron shared:

> I had caused my mom enough pain by going to prison, and I was committed to not causing her any more pain. So that's why I didn't get in trouble while I was in prison. I did not want to cause my mom pain, because I caused her enough by going to prison.

Pete, a participant who served a long-term sentence of 12 years, spoke about the loss of his relationship with his parents, who were both diagnosed with dementia during his incarceration. When Pete returned home from prison, he went to live with his father. He found that his father's dementia had progressed more than he had expected:

> When I headed to Erie where my 90-year-old father was. I lived there with my father, and I had to readjust to how much anxiety he had. I wasn't used to him, and he was not sleeping because he kept getting up at night, walking the halls.

Pete's mother, also diagnosed with dementia, passed away shortly after his release from prison.

In addition to his navigating parent's dementia diagnoses during and after incarceration, and the loss of his mother, Pete also talked about his sister's death, which occurred during his prison sentence. He shared:

> My sister--my best friend--died and I couldn't be there. They don't allow you to go to the services in the feds. It was difficult with my sister…you know, I was fortunate enough to be home for my mother, but I wasn't there for my sister when she was sick and passed away.

Pete expressed the importance of paying respect to his sister after he served his sentence: "That's the first place I went when I did get out, when I did get to my hometown, I went right to the grave."

Tim spoke about the passing of family members as it related to his incarcerations. His brother died 2 weeks prior to his interview, and he shared that due to his time spent in and out of jail and prison, "we didn't really know each other that well." Tim also lost his parents during his early twenties, the years when he struggled with drugs, arrests, and incarcerations. He shared his insight on these losses, and how he has used loss as a way to inspire change and personal growth:

> Thinking back on my life and my parents and brother, they've always been the type of people that are giving and caring and looking out for the next person and trying to be the best person for themselves in their community. When I started

> school and started to do the substance use work and the social work stuff, I was always thinking about my mom and dad. And now I'm finishing my social work degree when my brother passes away, and his lifestyle was to help people. And now my whole point in life is to live in their honor, to do things that I think would honor them…I fully shifted to this idea that for the first 30 years of my life I took from people and took from my family. Let's see if I can give back and repay the debts I took for the next 30 years.

Loss of a Parenting Relationship with Their Children. Loss of a parenting or co-parenting relationship was discussed by ten of the twelve participants. This was most often expressed as a breakdown in communication or harmony with a co-parent; loss of time with children or custody of children; or feelings of a loss of status or role as a parent due to being removed from day-to-day family contact and perceived stigma.

Randy was 22 years old and a new father when he was incarcerated and served a 10 month sentence for assault. He said that his incarceration and relationship breakup "created a wedge" between him and his daughter, who was age 6 at the time of his interview. Because the romantic relationship did not withstand his jail sentence, he lost his established relationship with his daughter. Randy's parenting time changed from generous shared custody (multiple contacts per week and overnights) to 90 minutes one day per week and 8 hours every other Sunday and no overnight visits. Randy explained that once his ex-girlfriend became involved in a new romantic partnership, she "doesn't want me in her life. She doesn't want me in her bubble, so I can't hang out with my daughter." This change in his parenting time caused noticeable changes in his daughter's behaviors including tearfulness and nightmares, and Randy described his daughter begging her mother to stay with him for a longer time, "crying, bawling her eyes out…and she'll

still look at her like ‘no, you’re not staying with your father’ and I can’t do nothing about it but say ‘I’m sorry’ to my daughter.” Randy said that he plans to return to probate court to adjust his parenting agreement with his ex-girlfriend, and concluded that, as for his relationship with his daughter at the time of his interview, “the co-parenting is trash.”

Tracy has a daughter with each of two exes, ages 8 and 10 at the time of her interview. She described reconnection with her children as “really difficult” and shared “I’m looking for ways to connect with my kids after being away for a couple of years.” Tracy described co-parenting relationships that were difficult and said that “the eight-and-a-half year old’s dad is still pretty angry with me, and that really affects the parenting relationship. He’s reluctant to let her spend a lot of time with me.”

When Tracy was asked about her relationship with her older daughter and co-parenting with her father, she shared “my older daughter’s dad, he’s definitely very resentful and I can’t blame him for that.” Tracy attributes her exes’ anger and resentment to her absence during her most recent two-year jail sentence, which was longer than her previous incarcerations. Tracy expressed understanding of her exes’ feelings of resentment toward her, but also recognized that the resentment contributes to the loss of her role as a mother and perpetuates her inability to co-parent with her children’s fathers.

Michelle was incarcerated for one year in a New Hampshire county jail for drug-related charges. She discussed her incarcerations as the catalyst for the loss of her close family relationships, describing her relationship with her children’s father as “really strained.” She shared:

> He’s so angry at me and my children are so angry at me for the path I was on and for not being there for them. It’s really very painful…I just don’t know if I’m ever going to be

> able to push past that and have any kind of relationship with my children or their father after being incarcerated so much. He was able to make all the decisions, I was not. I was in the background and because of that, he obviously became the primary parent. And it stayed like that.

Michelle's children were ages 14 and 10 at the time of her interview, and she said that it was because of her incarceration she lost custody of her children to her ex. However, Michelle credited her ex with keeping her children out of the foster system, saying "we are all fortunate that he is here because I think it would've been really hard if they had to go into the foster system. I'm really grateful that their dad has been able to take care of them." She went on to further describe the loss of her children, labelling it "devastating," and sharing "I miss them, and I've missed a lot of their growing up years."

At the time of her arrest, Amy and her ex-husband had three older children who were middle school aged. She was married to her second husband and had two younger daughters who were still in diapers. After her release from a 12-year sentence, her younger daughters were about the same age that her older children were at the beginning of her incarceration. She discussed the loss of her role as a mother during her interview, sharing:

> I took more of an aunt role. I was not included in their parenting at all during my incarceration, and that's one thing I really regret. I wasn't included in any decision making, that's why I would compare it to an aunt that lives out of state. That's the kind of relationship I had. They'd tell me all the good things, but I never knew about any punishments or any problems.

Amy indicated her understanding of why this was her experience and talked about her decision to take things slow now that she has finished serving her time: “I understand that and also I'm trying to change things, but it's going to be very slow.”

Amy shared that she sees her adult children and her younger daughters as often as she can. She said that the plan is for her girls to remain in her ex’s custody, but she sees them on the weekend. Her older children are busy and starting families of their own, and she was positive about the prospect of reconnecting with her family:

> They need to know me as a mom, and they haven’t known me as mom…They went through a lot and we’re still seeing the effects of that. And I imagine that we will, for a long time, all of us. But we’re working through it and we’re loving on each other.

Deborah’s interview responses focused on her perceptions of stigma in her relationship with her son. She said that when she was incarcerated, she felt her son was “probably embarrassed, and maybe still is embarrassed” by her. She said there was “a lot of judgment and a lot of shame” for her and her son, which impacted and changed her role as a mother, and she shared that she felt that it would have been “pretty taboo” for her son to tell others outside of their family that his mother was incarcerated.

Jim felt that his role as a father had changed and diminished because of limited access to his 10-year-old son during his year-long incarceration. He shared that the in-person visits at the facility where he served time were “traumatic” and “very unnatural” due to the security procedures commonly practiced in the carceral setting. Jim described that his son had to go through a scanning procedure that included walking through a metal detector and being checked with a hand-held metal detecting wand before visiting “through the glass” in which “each side picks up the phone and that’s how you talk to each other with the glass in between.” Because Jim

experienced feelings of stigmatization from visits and did not want his son to feel similarly, he and his husband decided that in person visits were "doing more harm than good…the visits were too hard on us." The family decided to forego in person visits and to focus on letters and phone calls because "it was easier to forget where we all were." Because Jim and his husband agreed that his arrest, which was witnessed by their son was traumatic and the visiting procedures were also traumatic, they did not include their son in the decision to stop in-person visits and focus on phone calls and letters.

Pete, who shared the losses of his relationships with his mother, father, and sister, also spoke extensively about his children. After his release from prison, Pete remarried and had his two younger daughters, ages 4 and 6 at the time of his interview. Pete's second marriage ended in divorce, and because that relationship began and ended years after his 12-year prison sentence was served, Pete did not speak about any impacts the incarceration had on these relationships or his divorce. After his divorce, Pete took a job in another region due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Because his incarceration deeply impacted his relationship with his oldest daughter from his relationship with his first wife, Pete's responses focused on her. He spoke proudly of his daughter, age 21 at the time of his interview, as well as a college student on a full scholarship for engineering. Pete explained, "she was a baby, an infant--maybe not even one--when I went away. I came back and she was 13." Because Pete's ex remarried, Pete decided to accept that another man would raise his daughter, leaving him in a supporting rather than a lead role. He said, "a great man raised her, and she was excited for me to meet him." Pete shared that he did get to meet his daughter's stepfather during a visit, laughing and saying:

> I met him, and I could see even my parents loved him. They were so close. And we just made things real easy…Like when I came home, we all went to dinner. I could go to dinner with him. I could go into the house.

Below, Table 6 shows the number, ages, and custodial and visitation information for the minor children of study participants.

Table 6

Information About Interview Participants' Children

	Amy	Christine	Deborah	Jim	Michelle	Pete	Randy	Tracy
Number of Children	5	2	1	1	2	3	1	2
Age(s) of Children at the Time of Incarceration	1, 2, 11, 12, 14	1,3	11	8	7, 11	1*	1	6,7
Custody at the Time of Interview: The Participant has custody (C); other parent has custody (OP); child is in foster care (FC)	OP	FC	C	C	OP	OP	OP	OP
Were there regular visits during incarceration?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Note. Pete is the father of three daughters, his oldest was an infant when he was first incarcerated and his younger daughters were born after he was released from prison.

Loss of Romantic Partnership. Six participants spoke about how their incarcerations caused changes to their romantic relationships. Tim's years of substance use and multiple incarcerations prevented him from entering into and sustaining a committed romantic relationship. During his interview, Tim said, "I was never married. I've had girlfriends off and on, but I've never been that type—that person—to have a super long-term relationship. I think I've dated somebody for a year at the most."

Jim, Deborah, and Mitch continued with their established romantic relationships throughout their incarcerations and into the reentry period, but they noted that incarceration

created changes in the relationship. Jim talked about “coming out and not knowing where the relationship stands” after his incarceration for domestic assault on his husband. He shared that he was unsure of where he would go when he was released, and “not really knowing the status” of his relationship and “not really knowing where I was going was the most stressful part of my reentry.” In terms of navigating his questions about his relationship and preparing for his release, Jim said, “you’re on your own.” Jim, who had a positive experience with a prison parenting program, remained in his marriage, living with his husband and their son at the time of data collection.

Deborah was happy to share that she maintained her relationship with her girlfriend during her incarceration and reentry and at the time of her interview, the relationship continued. However, Deborah spoke about the experience as “bittersweet” due to the loss of time with her girlfriend and son. Deborah said “when you’re together and you live under the same roof and sleep in the same bed every night, then for months you don’t have that, it’s pretty sad. I think it was depressing for us.”

Mitch noted a shift in his relationship with his girlfriend of several years but was not able to identify why this shift had occurred. He said that he and his girlfriend “were still together when I came home, but…the relationship felt different.” Mitch took responsibility for the change in the relationship, saying “it was mostly on me. The relationship feels totally different when you come home. I don’t know why; I couldn’t explain it. It was just weird.” Mitch described a growing apart that occurred during his incarceration, explaining “it just kinda felt like we were on two different planets” and this led to arguments, a lack of trust, and the eventual breakup.

Participants Tracy and Randy believed that the time spent incarcerated caused changes that ended their romantic relationships. Tracy described her last incarceration as her longest and

said that it launched “a definite change…that longer sentence really put a big rift in the relationship.” Tracy went on to say that the loss of her relationship with her children’s father has left her feeling as if she has had to “crawl out of a hole” and feeling that if she “hadn’t been in in and out of jail, I would have a much different living situation. I would be with my family, or I would still be with my ex.” Tracy reflected on her experiences of being released from jail without housing and having to stay at the local women’s shelter. She indicated that getting a job enabled her to move out of the shelter and rent a single room and she talked about her goal to “get my own place.”

Randy initially spoke about the positive aspects of being in a romantic relationship while in jail. During his interview, Randy noted that relationships are important to people while they’re incarcerated: “Having somebody to write to and talk to while you’re locked up is big.” He said that his relationship gave him “somebody to talk with to help clear my mind” and that the relationship kept him mentally positive. Although he and his girlfriend had been close prior to his incarceration and focused on parenting an infant daughter, signs of a change became clear to Randy when his 3 or 4 letters each week started to go unanswered. He shared, “a person can only take so much rejection…sending out letters through the week and not getting nothing back, not getting any phone calls, anything like that. It just brings you down a lot.” Randy explained that increasing distance caused his relationship to end soon after he began serving his 10-month sentence, “it was like, no contact.” Randy added that he wished that he and his girlfriend had ended the relationship before he served his sentence: “I would have rather just broken up before I got locked up and just went through my bid alone versus dealing with that while I was locked up.”

Loss of Relationship with Self. Two participants, Randy and Mitch, spoke openly about the loss of their own identity, and a shift in their understanding of themselves prior to experiencing the stress and trauma of incarceration. At ages 28 and 26, Randy and Mitch were the youngest participants interviewed. Both are Black and served sentences for assault charges (Randy,10 months; Mitch, two years). Randy expressed:

> People who are locked up are stressing, going through stressful times, and they might not have anybody to talk to, to relate the type of stress and pain that they're going through…If my mental health got any worse, I probably would have made a dumb decision. That would have got my parole taken away, or more time added on or something. Because I'm not thinking clearly, because I'm upset about somebody not writing back to my letters.

Mitch also talked about his mental health and a shift that he saw in himself after his incarceration, saying,

> I have PTSD from being in a cell so long. I can't stand cells and I have ADHD. Being in a cell that you can't move around that much, like you're stuck in a box. When you go home, like when my friend shut my door or something, well I need my door open. I need to be able to move. I need to be able to walk around. A lot of people, they have trauma from it.

None of the participants in the study spoke about any supportive programming or help that was provided during or after their incarcerations to address trauma, identity crisis, or mental health concerns. The following section presents results from questions that participants were asked about supportive programming for their families (partners and children).

Finding #5. *Participants reported no knowledge of any supportive programming available in their communities to partners and/or children.*

Ron and Tim were not asked about supportive programming for partners and/ or children during their interviews. Both experienced incarceration early in their lives, Ron at age 17 for a 27-year sentence and Tim at age 18, for multiple sentences lasting months up to 5 years throughout his 20s and 30s. Neither Ron nor Tim reported having a partner or children either prior to or after their incarcerations. During his interview, Mitch said that he considers the 12-year-old daughter of his ex-girlfriend to be his stepdaughter. However, Mitch does not have contact with his ex and has not had any formal parenting responsibilities to her daughter. During the two years he was involved with his ex-girlfriend, he did not live in the home with her and her daughter. Informally, he and his stepdaughter text occasionally, and Mitch pays for her to be included on his cell phone plan. Because of the limited nature of the relationship, Mitch was not asked about supportive programming.

The remaining nine participants who reported having partners and/or children were asked if they were aware of any supportive programming that may have been available to them during the time of their incarcerations. These might have been opportunities in conjunction with skills programming the participants were involved in or standalone programs offered through the incarcerating facility or in the community. All nine participants from seven different facilities responded that they had no knowledge of any supportive programming available. Five participants--Britney, Michelle, Amy, Randy, and Pete--replied with simple "no" answers and did not elaborate. Jim suggested "it would be nice if something were **available** to kids, especially little kids, but I think that there's that little bit of like stigma and secrecy surrounding people that are in jail." Tracy also responded that she was unaware of any available programming for family

and also mentioned secrecy: “I know that there were a couple of teachers for the kids that were supportive, and they knew what was going on, but other than that I was the family secret in a lot of ways.”

Deborah and Christine responded that they were unaware of any supports that were specifically targeted at partners or children of the incarcerated, but both made mention of organizations that they felt acted as ad hoc supports in the absence of anything explicitly aimed at their loved ones. Christine said that her state’s Department of Children, Youth, and Families was “the only thing you could call supports. Unfortunately, the boys had to go to foster care and it kills me, but that’s what is.” Christine did not identify any counseling, classes, or groups available within the DCYF scope.

In her response to questions about community supports for partners and children, Deborah mentioned that her partner, who is in recovery from a substance use disorder, found support on her own in her community 12-step support group. She said, “as far as any other kind of support groups, I don’t think there was anything like that available.” Rather than a supportive resource to assist her partner with navigating life during Deborah’s incarceration, her partner was able to find support from a source that already existed in her life.

Two participants, Jim and Michelle, mentioned that their children were involved in counseling, but the decision to pursue counseling was made by Jim’s husband and Michelle’s ex. Jim expressed that after his release, his husband and son joined him for family counseling. Michelle was aware that her children were in counseling because her ex felt it was helpful to her children in dealing with their mother’s incarceration, but she was not included in their counseling sessions.

Neither the RES nor archival data from the PIAAC PBQ included questions about programs available to partners or children while individuals are incarcerated.

RES and PBQ Information for Research Question #2. The RES did not include questions targeted at losses that individuals experienced. However, the results included six write-in responses that mentioned specifically or referred to loss. Each of the six responses voiced similar themes of loss of connection and relationship that are consistent with interview results. For the RES question "do you think there are any adjustments that your child/ children have had to make during your incarceration and reentry? What are they?" one respondent wrote that family "had to adjust to me not being there, and then to me coming back home," while another wrote "I don't think my kids know how to adjust to be honest. That's a lot to ask from little kids. They just feel I'm not around to help fix any issue they are having. That kills me." A third parent wrote that a GPS ankle monitor (typically used for "house arrest") was disrupting the family's ability to connect:

> Had I been informed that a GPS would prevent me from crossing state lines I would have absolutely refused. My children are in NH with family but unable to come to Mass. This alone has caused more problems in my life than my entire case and time in jail.

Two of the six RES writers referenced loss of a partner and single parenting in their responses. One father shared:

> I feel bad that I was not there and their lives have changed. I feel bad that I caused stress for my wife and the kids feel her stress and I'm sure blame me. The embarrassment of having a father in jail and becoming a one parent household.

The other included loss of employment in the following statement: “I became an only surviving parent of three toddlers with no help to improve my situation it became impossible to hold down a job.”

RES results show that zero respondents experienced any supportive programming for their partners or children during their incarcerations, which all ten respondents answering “None” to both the questions about supportive programming for families: “have your children received any community support during or after your incarceration?” and “has your partner received any community support during or after your incarceration?” This is consistent with interview results.

A final write-in RES respondent spoke of a disconnect between skills learning during incarceration and what happens back home:

> I want my kids and spouse to have information about the class too. Something that we could do as a family. They could do it out there and I could do it while incarcerated. Even if it was worksheets that get sent to them. I feel like I have grown and learned things but they haven’t learned anything new or allowed my growth.

This RES writer highlighted change, learning and growing, but longed for a way to share the transformation and make improvements with family rather than alone. Other suggestions for ideal programs were outlined by interview participants and are in Section 4, in which themes from participant feedback about their imagined ideal skills programs are presented.

Findings for Research Question #3: In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming during incarceration influences their ability to obtain and sustain employment post release?

Finding #6. *Participants reported that they experienced difficulties with employment after release.*

Ten study participants were employed full time. Exceptions to this were Jim, a full-time student, and Deborah, who was working in a food services job part time while studying for her high school equivalency. Deborah did not have the opportunity to work on her high school equivalency during incarceration because it was not offered at the specialized substance use treatment unit. Jim returned to graduate school to work toward his master's degree in mental health counseling after losing his job when he became incarcerated. Jim said:

> The biggest thing that [incarceration] did to affect my work life was to take me out of my previous job, which was a retail job. I was a manager at a department store, and it made me have this career change.

This is consistent with findings for Research Question #1, where Jim credits his experiences with parenting and anger management skills programming for helping him with focus, self-control, and goal setting.

Another participant, Michelle, was able to return to her previous employer, a healthcare company after serving a one-year sentence for drug-related felony charges. She considered herself fortunate for this, stating, "I was lucky to be able to return." Amy also spoke about luck in regard to her job as a warehouse associate at Amazon. She was able to gain employment because in her state, a background check only spans seven years from the day of sentencing. Since Amy served 12 years, she was able to pass a background check as soon as she was released.

Despite being employed, participants reported that they experienced difficulties related to employment during their reentry. These difficulties came in the form of perceived stigmatization because of a criminal background, feelings of being out-of-date or hindered by advancing technology, and by obstacles created by a lack of identification.

Stigma. The study participants perceived their experiences with employment as a major component of the reentry process and a sign of successful reentry. Eight of the twelve participants' responses focused on being labeled "a felon" or "having a criminal background" and the meaning participants constructed from this. Because of his felonious criminal background and lengthy twelve-year sentence, Pete experienced surprise when he got his job managing a large fitness center. He said, "I got hired—They hired me. I was shocked!" Tracy explained:

> When you've been to jail, you often feel like you're not welcome anywhere…They call certain employers "felon friendly" and knowing that institutions and colleges or certain programs are friendly to people who have been incarcerated and have a record is really important. Otherwise, people might stay away. People might think it's not available to them.

Tim also spoke about the stigma of the felon label when he sought work when he reentered the community nearly ten years ago after serving his last incarceration of five and a half years:

> When I first got out, I walked all over the city. I literally wore holes in my shoes because I walked all over looking for jobs and needed to make money. When I got to the part of

> disclosing that I had a felony, they said "thanks, but no thanks." So, I wound up working at a day labor place.

Tim spoke about still being stigmatized as a felon ten years later, after completing his bachelor's degree and nearing the completion of a master's degree in the decade after his release from prison. Pursuing his licensure as a drug and alcohol counselor (LADC), Tim applied to his state's licensing board. He said, "they denied me because I'm a felon. They said I hadn't been free from felonies for long enough. I'm going to reapply after I graduate and see what happens." Aside from the chance to reapply, Tim reported that he was not given any specific pathway or timeframe for licensure.

Although some of the participants spoke about having an easier time with finding a job, their responses also indicated that they felt restricted to certain types of jobs when they were released from prison. Tracy did not have felony charges on her record, and she shared that this might "make it a little bit easier" to find employment. She also noted that she was "just a cashier" working as a gas station and convenience store that's "not the best job in the world." She said that she chose this because it was similar to "the kind of stuff that I was doing before this last incarceration…entry level type jobs or service jobs."

Deborah echoed these limitations, stating that her job in the food services industry was "just a 'get well' job that I started as part of my treatment program." Because Deborah was working on her GED, or high school equivalency, the flexible hours and limited responsibilities of the job were helpful to her. She reported, "I've had to set boundaries there. I don't want to work my way up and be an assistant manager or manager. I just wanna do my job work my hours and focus on the other parts of my life." She added, "Once I get my GED, I think that there's gonna be more opportunity for me to work other places."

Randy said that his search for employment “wasn’t that hard” but noted that he intentionally found a job in construction: “I started off with construction when I first got out; they’ve always tended to be felon friendly.” He noted:

> There were other jobs, like higher paying, career based jobs, that my felon title did prevent me from landing. I will say if you’re trying to go big, and you’re trying to get a real good job, that title will hinder you. For most companies, it will.

One participant shared that he was not hindered when seeking employment, but this was because his company was specifically seeking a formerly incarcerated individual to run a jail diversion programming. Ron said his hiring manager told him “I’ve hired master’s level therapists and all that to run certain things and now I want to think outside the box.” This out-of-the-box thinking was to implant someone with lived experience into a position that would assist men coming out of prison with their reentry. Ron said that although he participated in a multitude of programs and earned a bachelor’s degree during his incarceration, he was “hesitant” when he was offered and accepted that job because after his 27-year sentence, “I’d never been to the corporate world. I had just come home.” Ron reported that he was maintaining and enjoying his position as the director of a jail diversion program at the time of his interview.

Britney noted that her own position working with individuals with substance use disorders as a Certified Recovery Support Worker (CRSW) might be predictive of change:

> I think about how important it is to find work that’s open to hiring somebody that has a criminal background or somebody that’s in recovery that has been dealing with addiction. Right now, it’s an interesting time because a lot of employers are taking a chance on people that maybe they would not have hired ten years ago or five years ago.

For Mitch, there was a feeling of tremendous pressure to find work within 48 hours to fulfill the requirements of his probation and parole. This is how he ended up working security at a restaurant and nightclub. However, like Britney, he spoke hopefully about people who like himself, will need to obtain employment in their reentry: “They just need someone to give them that one chance. Their background doesn’t speak for who that person is today—Just being incarcerated, it doesn’t define you.”

Falling Behind the Advancing Technology. While employment may be challenging due to self-imposed limitations or limitations created by stigma, access to available positions and the application process is an important factor. Although Tim, Amy, and Mitch all participated in skills programming while incarcerated, all three mentioned that when they were released they felt unprepared to access open job positions and the application process. They perceived this lack of preparedness was due to a lack of knowledge of advancing technology during their incarcerations.

Tim talked about how fast technology seemed to advance while he was incarcerated, saying:

> I went in before iPhones were a thing, and when I got out iPhone 4 or 5 was entering in. Nowadays things adapt so quickly that you go away for a couple of years and you’re gonna come out and have no idea what’s going on.

When Amy described her application process at Amazon, she said that “the technology of applying online” was “complicated” and “frustrating.” She applied and was hired for her job as a warehouse associate one month after her release from prison but said that the process was “very different for me” because “everything was completely online…including something I would

compare to a video game, like tests that you did in the process of getting that job. I was not familiar with any of that kind of technology."

Mitch echoed this confusion and unpreparedness by sharing that when he was released, he felt like everything was new: "New technology, new everything, new IDs, new rules, new regulations…And you're trying to figure it out."

Lack of Identification. Mitch's mention of identification, or IDs, was a theme in the participants' responses. The need for proper identification or documentation and facility inconsistencies in assisting with documentation was mentioned in three participant interviews. Christine shared that she was released with only her offender ID:

> When I was released, I did get an ID, but it was just a prison ID that they let me leave with. I wish that I had had some help with leaving with an actual usable ID like a birth certificate or a social security card, or a state ID. All of those would have been amazing, but even one of them would've been really helpful.

Amy described her release, reentry, and her hiring and onboarding experience with Amazon all being connected with her personal identification. She said that as she prepared for her release from prison, "the hardest thing for me was my documentation." She described a reentry program at the facility where she was incarcerated that women "go to and they apply for your social security card." She said that she and 12 other women were put into a room together and staff began to hand out documents one by one. "We kind of knew," Amy shared, "and half of those ladies left with an ID and a social security card, and the other half did not. And I didn't." Amy was not given any explanation for why she and some of the other women did not receive identification prior to their release from prison. Because Amy was not among the lucky women

who were released with new identifying documents, she was released with her offender ID only: I couldn't even get a prescription filled with my offender ID, so that was a huge challenge to try to get all of my documentation. You go to the social security office, and they want your birth certificate and then they want your ID, so you go to try to get an ID and they need your birth certificate and your social security card and it's just round and round and round.

Amy continued to search for work while still trying to sort out the problem of not having proper identification. Because she needed to obtain employment to begin earning an income immediately after her release, Amy stated that she did not have the time to wait for the documents she needed to arrive by mail. When it was time to provide photo ID to Amazon, she shared, "I had to use my offender ID because I hadn't gotten my ID yet." Amy explained that in her home state of Texas where she served her sentence, there is a time limit that certain convictions will appear on a background check and by the time she was released from prison, her employment background check would have been clear. However, the necessity for Amy to use her offender ID disclosed her background to her employer: "So they knew. Obviously, it's in my paperwork, and there's a picture of my Texas offender ID, my prison ID."

Finally, Ron noted that for him, many contacts he encountered in his 27 years incarcerated and for the individuals he currently assists with reentry, the area of vital documents is a problem. Ron understood that many facilities operate independently and "some are better than others" in assisting soon-to-be released inmates with identification but noted that identification can play a big role in obtaining employment, housing, and many forms of government assistance that might benefit someone reentering the community. Ron explained that he and his staff work hard with individuals who have been released from prison to make sure each person gets their state ID. He said, "these are important things and things that need to be

held to account. There needs to be commitment by staff to help guys obtain their vital documents prior to release."

Finding #7. *Participants identified a longing for more opportunity to build skills, explore career options and opportunities, and experience successes.*

Five of the twelve interview participants identified feelings of longing for more opportunities during their incarcerations. Participants were asked if there is anything that they wished they had learned during their incarcerations. This question generated many responses that focused on their desire for more extensive skills learning.

Tracy described her experiences with skills programming as "little bits and pieces here and there." She expressed her desire for "more long-term options. Something that's more of a commitment for people to stick with throughout the time they're incarcerated." Michelle expressed a similar opinion, saying "the program I took was not very long." She said that during her incarcerations, she noticed that she and her peers lacked skills such as "financial planning or banking…the day to day stuff that adults have to do. A lot of the women didn't have those skills and it would have been nice if the programs were expanded."

Tim said that when he got to prison, much of his time was spent figuring out how to live in the facility, and he longed for specific skills training that might have targeted employment needs: "There wasn't really an opportunity to learn anything specific, it was more like social learning, like how to act inside the walls." He suggested that "computer skills would be helpful in job searching, resume writing skills, and with all the stuff you didn't learn while you were doing the thing that got you into prison!"

Mitch and Randy also longed for job skills that would foster feelings of competence. Mitch said:

> I'm not gonna lie—I was one of those people that didn't have any skills to do certain jobs. But you just kinda wing it…It's scary for guys that don't have any skills to have to try to go out and get a job and pretend they know how to do some of this stuff.

Randy said "honestly, I wish we had classes that revolved around skill sets…I would definitely have a better job right now if I had left with a skill set to be able to pursue the job that I wanted."

RES and PBQ Information for Research Question #3. RES participants were asked if they attended an Employment Readiness program during their incarceration, and nine respondents to the question replied they had not. Eight of ten respondents answered that this type of program was not available at the facility that they served time at, and one responded, "not eligible." Eight of the nine respondents answered that they were "employed full time," and one replied "other."

When asked "why do you think you have had difficulty in getting hired?" RES respondents replied with the following write-in comments:

- "My record."
- "My criminal record has made some employers hesitant or unwilling to hire me."
- "Because I was Incarcerated. And employers aren't willing to look past the negative and see the positive and give people a second chance."

The RES results and write-in responses are consistent with results from the interview participants.

The PIAAC PBQ did not provide supplemental information for this section because one hundred percent of participants were incarcerated at the time the background questionnaire and survey were administered.

Finding Across Research Questions

This section presents a final finding that crosses all study research questions and shows that individuals who were once incarcerated have opinions and ideas based on their lived experiences about how a better system could be created to prepare prisoners more effectively for reentry. At the end of each of the twelve interviews, participants were asked, "if you were asked to design a skills program for jail or prison, what would your main goal of the program be? What would the most important topics be? Could you describe how you think those topics would be helpful for you or others? How would you set your program up?" Since most prison programming and reform comes from people who have not experienced incarceration themselves, these questions were included to gain an insider's perspective of what a better system might look like and how it might operate. Finding #8 was built upon the themes that emerged from this segment of the participant interviews.

Finding #8. *Using their own voices and words and relying on their unique lived experiences, participants identified social-emotional development, practical skills, and prescribed programming as items to be included in an ideal prison program.*

When participants were asked to describe their ideal prison skills programming in their own words, responses were divided into four groups: Six participants who focused on social-emotional development, such as working toward healthier relationships and improving self-worth; five participants who called for more concrete, hands on training aimed at future employment; five participants who focused on programs that would target areas of need, providing supports for personal growth and training for skills that could be transferred into a career or employment settings; and last, one participant who drew upon his lived experience and suggested other ways programming could be improved for people who are serving a prison sentence.

Social-Emotional Development. The theme of social-emotional development was present in six participant interviews. Britney, Amy, Tim, and Deborah suggested that focus on the improvement of self-esteem and self-worth would be an important focus of their ideal prison program. Amy shared her feelings that this type of work would actually be a foundation that might support a person's capacity for learning other things:

> Mostly I would want to work on teaching self-esteem skills, self-confidence skills. Generally, people who are incarcerated, they've beaten themselves down so extremely. Either they've been beaten down their whole lives, or they're like me and messed up so royally that you beat yourself down, and there's such a feeling of worthlessness in there. And the problem with feeling that way is you don't feel like you can ever be more than what you are right at that moment, so if I learned other life skills, I'm not confident to implement them, you know?

Tim referenced his education and employment in the field of social work when he responded to questions about an ideal program. He also talked about how self-worth could act as a building block for someone implementing other skills, saying that inmates would be helped by being taught to self-identify areas of self-worth, inner strength, inner drive, and resilience. He shared that these areas would make it easier for someone to manage the rejection that can come along with reentry, saying that a person may be less frustrated when "applying for things and being denied when you get to that part where they ask for your felonies and stuff."

The connection between trauma and self-esteem arose in Deborah's description of an ideal prison program. She shared that she felt the importance of assistance with "going back" to what was happening before a person becomes incarcerated is important for healing and personal growth. She said,

> for many people, myself included, it goes back to things that happened early in our lives, in our families and in our childhood. And some of those experiences are really negative and traumatic, and then that can lead to issues with self-esteem and PTSD and, you know, and then throw some substances in there. And it's like a recipe for disaster.

The need for programming to support and "build people's self-esteem up" was present in Britney's response. She emphasized the importance of this work "to be positive" and to focus on "honest communication" about an individual's real issues "aside from whatever brought them into the jail or the prison." Britney suggested that this might be accomplished through creative arts, such as music or dance: "Keeping it positive and building self-esteem, that's something that could be done through music, through dance, through being creative."

Deborah's response to questions about imagining an ideal prison program also focused on creativity. She suggested that the learning environment is very important to a positive programming experience. Although she acknowledged that "in prison it's not possible" not to worry about contraband, in her ideal program, there would be better access to supplies for "art and crafts" and "writing implements" like "pens and makers and paper" along with an environment that is "nice, clean and bright" with classrooms that do not look like children's classrooms, but "something that's more adult." She suggested "instead of desks have tables so people could sit in groups and not have everything arranged in aisles to make things seem more welcoming and more of a relaxed type of environment."

Relationships were the focus of both Jim and Tracy's responses, and both thought that learning about the skills that help to build and enhance positive relationships would be worthy of a person's time during incarceration. Tracy said, "I wish that they had spent time teaching us about relationships, family relationships, having a partner, those kinds of relationships." Jim

recommended that family or couples' counseling be started before a person leaves prison, saying "the biggest thing that has helped us is doing some family counseling and I wish that's something we could have done or started while I was incarcerated."

Practical Skills. The core of Mitch, Randy, Jim, Ron, and Michelle's responses contained suggestions for practical and hands on skills building, which could be applied once released from incarceration. These participants felt that hands on skills would better prepare incarcerated people for their reentry by boosting their desirability for employers along with providing individuals with a sense of accomplishment and competence. These responses focused on concrete skills and goals intended for people to apply to life on the outside in securing and maintaining employment.

Michelle reflected on her own experience of being able to return to her employer after her incarceration and said that other should leave prison with "some kind of vocational skills or some kind of certification to help with employment."

Jim called for concrete skills and stressed that the training would be very practical, hands on, and applicable to life once a person was released from prison. He said,

> my main goal would be really practical, to teach the guys something practical, something that they can that they can learn and do right away. Not just talking and thinking about things, but something where you're really gonna do something. Something skills or task focused that can be practiced. Something that could be quantified. So if they can do it, they see the result of it.

Randy suggested a two-phase training process, where people would have an introduction to a trade, such as carpentry, "for beginners to learn the basics." Once that is successfully completed, they could move to a second class that would be "something more, more intricate,

more skillful." Randy explained that both sections would incorporate basic job skills, such as "how to properly use your tools and how to conduct yourself on a work site" but the second part would include more advanced tools and techniques. He explained that at his job where he started working without previous training, some of the tools "weigh 60, 70, 80 pounds, and if you're not using the right technique you can hurt yourself."

Mitch had a similar idea to allow individuals to have actual hands on experience practicing the skills taught in his program before they are released from prison. He suggested that a store could be set up and inmates could interview to work there to learn skills such as stocking, ringing up sales, and handling money. It was Mitch's idea that this would give a person a real-life experience that could be included on a resume for getting a job in the reentry period. Mitch pointed out that it would be important that this be treated as a real work environment, and it would be helpful to have both inmates and correctional staff involved that would be understanding of this: "Obviously you would have to pick the correctional officers that are especially equipped for that and how they would handle the inmates and stuff like that. Like obviously, neither are aggressive."

Ron's response focused on practical skills aimed at getting reentering individuals right into gainful employment. Ron was careful to distinguish that his goal would be that of a career path rather than a job:

> I've got friends that came home and are driving trucks, they make $5,000 to $7,000 a month…I've got a friend who got his HVAC certification while incarcerated. He makes very good money, starting at $40 or $50 an hour coming out of prison and doing HVAC…That's money that someone can actually make a living. You know, that's a situation—That's a career. That's not a job. Yes, that is an actual career.

Prescribed Programming. Five participants suggested the importance of programming being individually prescribed, rather than a "one size fits all" approach. There was also a theme of thoughtful assignment into available programs, along with having high standards that would lead to real, tangible accomplishments rather than recognition that is only meaningful within a facility during the time of incarceration.

Michelle indicated that targeting specific inmates for specific programs would alleviate vacant spots in programs being taken by people who may not need them, may not be interested in them, or may be inappropriately matched for them. She said, "the biggest thing would be having some kind of placement system for people." Michelle also emphasized that there is a need for meaning, both in the learning that happens in programs but also in the goal or the outcome of the program. She referred to the practice of giving certificates of completion for programs in prison that are not recognized outside of the facility, such as with an employer or educational institution:

> Have something really be meaningful, not just "everyone gets a trophy for every little thing." In a lot of these facilities, they give out certificates all the time, but that certificate doesn't mean much outside of the facility. It's nice--it's encouraging for people, but once you leave jail, that certificate from your life skills class doesn't apply in the real world. Having things that have real world significance would be useful.

Christine had a similar response, suggesting that individuals' needs be evaluated and then they be placed in an appropriate program with a practical purpose and tangible outcome, such as a high school diploma, a certification, or a degree. Christine said that her "main goal would be that everybody leaves with something to show for their time—Some kind of skill, education, or certification." She went on to say that she felt that prison programming "needs to be really

concrete…It can't be learning for the sake of learning. It needs to have some kind of outcome for people."

Jim's response to his idea of ideal prison programming also related to appropriate placement in programs. He described an improved sign up process that would be different from the one he experienced while incarcerated, where "the counselor came on to the unit and everyone flocked over to sign up…because they were bored and trying to get off the unit for an hour." Jim suggested that someone could vet prospective participants in order to raise and maintain standards:

> There could be an application process--some way for the guys themselves to show they're serious about it. Maybe there would be an interview process because then it wouldn't just be a free for all just come on in and people can act any certain way. If you have some standards, if there's an application and an interview, people might take it really seriously.

Both Amy and Tracy suggested that time is another valuable consideration when it comes to an ideal prison program. Amy, whose focus was on soft skills, shared that she would like her program to start from the very beginning of a person's incarceration, "from the get-go" because "it's not something I feel like could be done like the last six weeks or even last half-year of your incarceration." Tracy contributed a similar idea when she said,

> you know, I would make it so things weren't so short. If people are in prison for years, a six week program doesn't seem very significant. It seems like a tease. Maybe have long term options that are more of a commitment for people to stick with throughout the time they're incarcerated so it's not little bits and pieces here and there.

Finally, one participant, Pete, suggested parts of his imagined ideal program that were standalone themes. His ideal programming focused on increasing opportunity for education to be provided to incarcerated people, along with the opportunity to enter into military services: “if it wasn't violent, if it was your first time in, you'd have an opportunity to go in the military. I think something like that can change a person.” Pete also suggested that it could be an effective strategy to incentivize a program by offering a way to expunge a felony record through one’s participation. He said, “if it was not a violent offense, there would be the opportunity for one-time felons to expunge their felony through behavior and education programs.”

Table 7 shows the themes that emerged from participants’ responses about their imagined ideal skills programs.

Table 7

Interview Participants’ Focus of Imagined Ideal Programming

Participant	Amy	Britney	Christine	Deborah	Jim	Michelle	Mitch	Pete	Randy	Ron	Tim	Tracy
Expressed Desire for Social-Emotional Learning	X	X		X	X						X	X
Expressed Desire for Practical Skills					X	X	X		X	X		
Expressed Desire for Prescribed Programming	X		X		X	X						X

Chapter Summary

The overall results of the study show that interview participants had clearly defined and consistent reasons for participation and non-participation in employment readiness, reentry, parenting, life skills, and anger management programming. As a part of their involvement in skills programming, participants experienced learning that was perceived to be transformative. These changes were perceived as positive by participants despite a reported lack of support for their partners and children and the many losses that were experienced during their incarcerations. Finally, results showed difficulty with employment due to perceived stigma, lack of supports to navigate the ever-developing technology used to obtain and maintain employment, and the participants' inability to obtain identification before their release. Table 8 shows the themes that were expressed by each of the interview participants below.

Table 8

Overview of Themes From the Study Findings

Themes Expressed by Participants	Amy	Britney	Christine	Deborah	Jim	Michelle	Mitch	Pete	Randy	Ron	Tim	Tracy
"Something To Do" Was a Main Reason for Program Participation	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	
"Self-Improvement" Was a Main Reason for Program Participation	X	X				X	X	X				X
Experienced Connection to Others Through Skills Programming	X				X	X		X				X
Experienced Transformative Learning	X			X	X	X	X				X	X
Reported Difficulties with Access and Availability	X			X						X	X	
Experienced a Loss or Losses	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reported a Lack of Supportive Programming for Partners/Children	X	X	X	X	X	X	n/a	X	X	n/a	n/a	X
Reported Difficulties with Employment After Release	X			X	n/a	n/a	X	X	X		X	X
Experienced a Longing for More Opportunities						X	X		X		X	X
Expressed Desire for Social-Emotional Development	X	X		X	X						X	X
Expressed Desire for Practical Skills					X	X	X		X	X		
Expressed Desire for Prescribed Programming	X		X		X	X						X

Note. For "Reported a Lack of Supportive Programming for Partners/Children," "n/a" appears for participants who did not have partners/children at the time of their incarceration. For "Reported Difficulties with Employment After Release," "n/a" appears for Jim, a full-time student, and Michelle, whose previous position was held for her.

Study findings are as follows:

1. Participants reported self-improvement, having something to do, and connection to others as reasons for skills program participation.

2. Participants reported lack of program availability and limited access to program as reasons for non-participation.

3. Participants reported that their experiences with learning skills during incarceration was transformative.

4. Participants experienced relationship losses during incarceration.

5. Participants reported no knowledge of any supportive programming available in their communities to partners and/or children.

6. Participants reported that they experienced difficulties with employment after release.

7. Participants identified a longing for more opportunity to build skills, explore career options and opportunities, and experience successes.

8. Participants identified social-emotional development, practical skills, and prescribed programming as items to be included in an ideal prison program.

The discussion that follows in Chapter Five was informed by the study findings and will incorporate the themes from participant interview responses.

CHAPTER FIVE: Study Summary, Discussion, Future Research, and Final Reflections

This dissertation study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of reentering individuals who participated in skills programming during their incarcerations in order to contribute to a new understanding of the role of prison skills programming in family and employment during reentry. The study of the participants' experiences and perceptions was important because of the contribution of real and authentic voices that added new information and depth to the literature beyond what has been previously captured by the analysis of recidivism statistics and large longitudinal studies.

Chapter One introduced the dissertation study by contextualizing information surrounding prison skills programming, reentry, and recidivism. The chapter also outlined the personal perspective of the researcher, introduced the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study, which was followed by the study's guiding research questions and definition of terms used in the dissertation. The significance of the study and delimitations of the study were presented, along with an overview of the literature review and the method. Finally, Chapter One provided a chapter outline for the dissertation.

The review of the literature in Chapter Two revealed common themes and overlapping recommendations for the programming available to individuals during incarceration and reentry and the challenges and supports faced by incarcerated and reentering individuals and those who are connected to them, mainly partners and children. An important discovery uncovered through the literature review was that prison skills programming takes many forms in instruction, curriculum, desired outcome, and time spent in the program, but there is a lack of cohesiveness in life skills programming instruction, goals, and desired outcomes: none of the literature

reviewed revealed programming that was supported by or administered according to any standardized best practices. This showed that skills programming offered to individuals during their incarceration that is intended to assist them during reentry operates in a siloed fashion, without reliance on evidence-based practices or curricula, clear goals for this type of programming, desired outcomes for reentering individuals and their reunification with family and employment, or consistent use of existing learning and development theory to support skills programming goals.

The theories that were highlighted in the literature review created a foundational framework in which the guiding research questions could be explored. The theoretical framework also served to increase the level of connectivity that was not found in existing literature: mainly connection between available skills programming during an individual's incarceration and what happens as a result of that programming during reentry. The theories explored in Chapter Two: transformative learning theory and *bildung*, intersectionality, ecological systems theory, and family adjustment and adaptation were a conduit that connected all aspects of the dissertation--the existing bodies of literature, researchers (including myself), participants, family members, children, program administrators, and employers--to one another.

Chapter Three described the design, method, instruments, and procedures used in the study. A mixed-methods design using a phenomenological approach for the qualitative inquiry was employed in order to best explore the participants' experiences with skills programming and their perceptions of how their involvement with skills programming influenced their reintegration with family and employment during reentry.

Chapter Four presented a brief overview of the method, including adjustments that were approved by the IRB. This was followed by demographic information about the interview

participants, and finally, the findings of the study. There were eight findings for the three research questions that guided the dissertation.

This closing chapter will present the overall findings followed by a discussion of each finding organized by the guiding research questions. A final finding, one that crossed the three research questions, is discussed in this section. Implications, recommendations, suggestions for future research, and limitations are presented followed by my final reflections about the project.

Discussion

Eight study findings highlighted reasons for participation or non-participation in skills programming during incarceration; learning experiences during incarceration; and the influences of skills programming on family relationships and employment during reentry. One key finding involved a pervasive experience with both direct and ambiguous loss during incarceration that was present for each interview participant. Other findings identified participants' wants and needs for skills programming based on their own lived experiences and on their imaginings of an ideal prison skills program.

The findings from this study suggested that individuals who were involved with skills programming during incarceration and then experienced reentry have been an overlooked source of information. The individuals who participated in the study as RES respondents and as interview participants revealed how programming affected their reentry into family living and employment once released from incarceration. Strong connections between prison learning and reentry were not found in the existing bodies of literature that were reviewed for this dissertation study. Study interview participants shared experiences about incarceration and reentry that provided "before, during, and after" information, and contributed a fuller and more cohesive view of how skills programming during incarceration influenced reentry.

This realization aligned both with Potter's "braided" description of an intersectional approach and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) collaborative and tapestry-like (p. 95) relationship between researcher, participant, and experience as well as with Bronfenbrenner's nested model (1977, 1986). The value in these connections highlights the importance of understanding incarceration and reentry through the lens of ecological systems. The ecological systems approach recognizes rather than separates the incarcerated individual and the reentering individual. The nested model encompasses the potential success and wellbeing of reentering individuals beginning with improved self-esteem and widening relationships with others and the community. Improved self-esteem, relationship skills, and sustained employment make contributions that support the wellbeing of partners and children. The findings of this study indicate the benefit of connectivity over compartmentalization, and this is resoundingly related to the foundational theories discussed in Chapter Two.

The findings of this study further showed that valuing the unique voices of individuals who had direct experience with the phenomena enriched the understanding of different wants and needs of incarcerated and reentering individuals. The social-emotional features of the findings expand the possibilities for incarcerated and reentering individuals. This goes beyond reducing recidivism and includes family members and community stakeholders, such as employers. This was particularly true for Finding #8, in which the words, voices, and experiences of the participants were so important.

Though this study is small in scope, the findings open up opportunities to strengthen family relationships and increase instances and experiences with transformative learning that strengthen *bildung*, that "process of self-formation with the realization of human autonomy as one of its main ideals" (Buttigieg and Calleja, 2021, p.174). Doing so may increase self-reliance

and self-worth which could help to decrease the negative impacts of incarceration on individuals and their loved ones. According to Sorkin (1983), self-reliance and social bonds share an interrelated development: “one develops through the voluntary interchange of one’s individuality with that of others. Self-formation, in other words, requires social bonds” (pp. 58-59). Ironically, these points may have gone undiscovered if the change to the method had not occurred. The shift in reliance to the in-depth interviews and increasing the number of interviews from 4-6 to 12 individuals expanded the voices, words, and lived experiences of the participants and allowed them to stand out.

When compared with the literature reviewed for Chapter Two, the interview participant sample in this dissertation was unusually diverse. The sample represented diversity in racial and ethnic background as well as in gender and sexual orientation, with five participants identifying as female, one as gender nonbinary, and six as male. Six participants identified as LGBTQIA (one individual shared that she was a transgender woman, two were bisexual, one lesbian, and one gay). Gender diversity and LGBTQIA individuals are underrepresented in the literature about incarceration and reentry.

The sample also included individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Seven participants identified their race as White and one identified as Hispanic; four individuals identified themselves as Black, and one identified as Hispanic; one participant identified both racially and ethnically as Middle Eastern.

The diversity of the interview sample resulted in lived experiences and quotations that were rich, informative, and representative of many populations. Each individual took part in the interview process with both depth and vibrancy, so individually the interviews provided valuable data; however together they were synergistic. Analysis of the participants’ generosity of

information culminated in findings that have heuristic value that could serve as a foundation for new areas of future research, as discussed in the "Suggestions for Future Research" section.

There were two surprises that emerged from the data collection and analysis. First, themes of death and relationship losses were prevalent in the data, and this realization led to an unexpected finding pertaining to grief and ambiguous loss among RES respondents and interview participants. Second, the final question included in the interview protocol asked participants to describe their ideal prison skills program, and analysis of their responses led to a finding that crossed all three of the research questions. A discussion and implications gleaned from the findings are presented in the following sections, organized according to each of the three guiding research questions and ending with the finding that crossed all research questions.

Findings for Research Question #1

Research Question 1 asked, "what reasons do individuals provide for participation or non-participation in skills programming during their incarceration?" The findings for this research question were:

Finding #1. *Participants reported self-improvement, having something to do, and connection to others as reasons for skills program participation.*

Finding #2. *Participants reported lack of program availability and limited access to programs as reasons for non-participation.*

Finding #3. *Participants reported that their experiences with learning skills during incarceration was transformative.*

Interview participants gave reasons such as self-improvement, having something to do, and experiencing connection to others as reasons for participation. This along with participant responses about wanting opportunities for skills and employment suggests that a clear pathway

to and foundation for transformative learning and *bildung* exists in prison skills programs. This pathway is present because the concept of transformative learning suggests that "one understands their experiences" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) and in *bildung*, experiences "self-formation" (Sorkin, 1983).

In their quests for connection to others and fulfilling activity in order to experience self-improvement, the interview participants perceived that transformation and *bildung* increased social emotional development and self-worth of incarcerated and reentering individuals. Mitch exemplified this when he said: I'm growing. I'm glad I'm changing, glad I'm not this old Mitch."

Access to and availability of skills programming were critical points in the findings, and along with interesting connections with several variables, such as men's facilities versus women's facilities and types of facilities (e.g., prison, jail, prerelease). The literature was primarily focused on men's prison experiences and the effects of men's incarceration on female partners and children (Bir, et al., 2017; Bruns & Lee, 2020; Geller, et al., 2011; McKay, Feinberg, et al., 2018; Turney, 2015). None of the literature reviewed that utilized data from large national studies (SVORI, NSCH, FFCW, Add Health, or MFS-IP) focused exclusively on women and/or mothers, and only four of the regional and single site studies reviewed focused exclusively on incarcerated and reentering women's family/ parenting relationships or employment (Alsem, et al., 2021; Miller, 2021; Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2019; Weseley & Dewey, 2019).

There were few studies that focused on skills programming in the five areas of focus (e.g., employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management) featured in the literature (Alsem, et al., 2021; Bollinger & Yelowitz, 2021;

Visher, et al., 2008), and there was no specific discussion in the literature about program accessibility or availability. The studies in the review looked at programming, individuals' experiences, and outcomes but none focused on why certain individuals were interested in participating or were allowed to access the programs. In thinking about the findings related to access and availability, language and literacy were important points to consider. Interview participants reported that they were informed about programming opportunities by written announcements, correspondence with a programs department, or sign ups that took place during a staff visit to a unit. If these modalities were only offered in English, that would have excluded speakers/readers of other languages. If they were only offered through text or printed materials, it would have excluded individuals with literacy difficulties. Finally, if staff members visiting a unit to promote a program and/or offer the opportunity to sign up are not known to or trusted by the individuals, it could present a barrier to a program's accessibility. It was surprising that none of the studies reviewed for this research undertaking explored program availability, eligibility, or modes of accessing programs as a preparatory component of the reentry process.

Findings for Research Question #2

Research question two asked, "in what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming influences family life and family relationships post-release?" The findings for this research question were:

Finding #4. *Participants experienced relationship losses during incarceration.*

Finding #5. *Participants reported no knowledge of any supportive programming available in their communities to partners and/or children.*

The number and range of losses identified by the participants exceeded expectations from the literature. The majority of losses that were reported by interview participants and RES

respondents were ambiguous losses, meaning that they were not losses caused by the death of a friend or loved one. According to Knight and Gitterman (2019), ambiguous loss "involves grief in response to the changed nature and circumstances of a significant relationship" (p. 164). Because there were no questions in the RES or interview protocol about death, loss, or grief, the data generated by RES respondents and interview participants leading to this finding came as a surprise.

Ambiguous loss was defined by Boss (2016) as "a situation of unclear loss that remains unverified and thus without resolution" (p. 270). The loss finding in this dissertation came from reported losses of relationships within the family of origin (such as with parents or siblings), losses in romantic partnerships and parenting roles and relationships, and individuals' loss of identity. Knight and Gitterman explained that an "ambiguous loss associated with physical absence, but psychological presence, occurs when a loved one is incarcerated" (p. 166). Interview participants described their ambiguous losses in depth. Randy suggested that one loss was with self-identity, while Mitch shared, "I have PTSD from being in a cell so long."

Another type of ambiguous loss was experienced through changes in romantic partnership, described by Jim as "stressful," by Deborah as "depressing for us," and by Mitch, who said, "the relationship felt different." Ambiguous losses in parenting relationships were expressed by participants, some of whom lost custody of their children, or lost time with their children, or lost their status as a parent, such as Amy, who shared that she "took more of an aunt role."

Arditti (2005) explained that "parenting capacity is likely diminished as a result of incarceration; thus, parental incarceration has profound exosystemic effects on families" (p. 256); however, literature focused on the ambiguous losses experienced by prisoners during

incarceration was not found. Since ambiguous loss as it relates to incarcerated and reentering individuals is an area that needs further exploration, how these losses (and lack of treatment) might be a barrier to skills programming. Even for those who have not experienced incarceration, ambiguous loss "has only begun to be recognized" and is "largely overlooked" (p. 171). A return to the literature found that ambiguous loss related to incarceration has received increasing attention but regards the ambiguous loss from the viewpoint of the family, most often children, who are left behind during an incarceration. No research that was focused on ambiguous loss experienced by those who are incarcerated or reentering was found.

The unexpectedness and poignancy of ambiguous loss was deepened by Finding #5, in which participants reported a lack of awareness of any supports available to their children and partners during their incarcerations. This revealed that while loss existed for individuals who are incarcerated and their loved ones, there were no interventions or supports routinely available and delivered for either. It is unclear whether this type of supportive programming for family members with an incarcerated loved one exists in the community or not. It is also possible that there are community supports available but people have not heard of them or are unable to access them. This would indicate a lack of connection and information distributions to get and potential existing supports to a target population in need to improve knowledge of resources and supports and to increase access in communities where supports for reentering individuals and their families are needed.

While supportive community programming for partners and children abounds in the recommendations in the literature, there were no longstanding community programs providing wraparound services to partners and children during an individual's incarceration and reentry apparent in the literature. One study highlighted in the literature review (Kazura, 2018),

discussed a couple's relationship enhancement program that began before release and continued into the reentry period, but this was a small, forty couple study that was piloted and then discontinued due to facility security concerns.

Findings for Research Question #3

Research question three asked, "In what ways do individuals who have been incarcerated perceive that their participation in skills programming during incarceration influences their ability to obtain and sustain employment post-release?" This led to two findings:

Finding #6. *Participants reported that they experienced difficulties with employment after release.*

Finding #7. *Participants identified a longing for more opportunity to build skills, explore career options and opportunities, and experience successes.*

Interview participant responses included information about their reentry being impeded by a lack of personal identification upon release from prison. This required a return to the literature to find existing research about identification during reentry, and it was evident that this is an area that has yet to emerge. Using statistics from the United States Bureau of Prisons, The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a report about the number of reentering individuals who are released from prison with identification (2022). Of 146,565 released in six states (Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio, and Virginia), GAO found that 29% (43, 170) were released with one form of identification, but 37% (54,704) were released with zero forms of identification. Additionally, another 115 (15,707) were listed as "status undetermined." This indicates an area of great need for reentering people, as ID is necessary for employment as well as social supports that could help transition to the community.

The GAO (2022) made recommendations that would help to eliminate roadblocks created when someone does not have personal identification. Five recommendations were offered to assist reentering individuals with identification: the development of a federal ID card; better data collection by the Bureau of Prisons to record whether or not individuals have identification; clear documentation of whether or not individuals have documentation that is at home at the time of their incarceration; and data collection about individuals who obtain identification while living in federally supported reentry centers.

The GAO report highlighted how facilities in some states handle the problem of identification for reentering individuals by providing a state-issued ID or a prison ID that can be exchanged for a state-issued ID to individuals upon release; DMV mobile licensing services that visit prisons to assist individuals with obtaining identification upon their release; DMV offices imbedded at correctional facilities; and correctional staff cross-trained to assist reentering individuals with obtaining their driver's license of state-issued ID upon release (GAO, 2022).

Development of skills that could be transferred into the reentry period and specifically to employment was a theme that was present in existing literature, suggesting employment could be viewed as a measure of post-incarceration success (Flake, 2015; Wallace, et al., 2016; Western & Sirois, 2019). A focus on concrete, modern-day hiring practices, such as online resumes or employment profiles or remote video interviewing was not found in the literature. Given the recent publication of the GAO findings, there was no discussion of obtaining identification such as a birth certificate, social security card, state ID, or driver's license during incarceration or reentry that might help with obtaining employment or social/community supports.

Finding Across Research Questions

Finding #8. *Using their own voices and words and relying on their unique lived experiences, participants identified social-emotional development, practical skills, and prescribed programming as items to be included in an ideal prison program.*

Data gathered from the twelve participant interviews yielded a finding that crossed the three guiding research questions. At the end of each of the twelve participant interviews, individuals were asked, "If you were asked to design a skills program for jail or prison, what would your main goal of the program be? What would the most important topics be? Could you describe how you think those topics would be helpful for you or others? How would you set your program up?" Because the finding was an identified need for social-emotional development, practical skills, and prescribed programming, implementing skills learning during incarceration that encourages competence as well as participation might be critical. Interview participants also expressed the desire for participation and learning in skills programs to be transferrable outside of the prison setting in order to support their reentry.

Consistent with this dissertation's exploration of transformative learning and intersectionality as frameworks, a return to the literature suggested that social emotional development in itself can be transformative and intersectional. According to Jagers, et al. (2019), transformative social emotional learning "requires explicit critical examination of the root causes of racial and economic inequities to foster the desired critical self- and social awareness and responsible individual and collective actions in young people and adults" (p. 178). Although there is understanding of the importance of social emotional learning as part of life skills learning and how this may relate to incarceration and reentry, existing literature along with findings from this dissertation indicate that while the puzzle pieces exist, they are not yet pieced together to create a whole and cohesive picture to guide skills programming practices.

Perhaps consideration of the keen observations of individuals with rich and unique lived experiences is a "missing piece" to the reentry puzzle. This information could fill in gaps and inform decision making about the types of skills and skills programming that are most helpful during incarceration and reentry. Inviting formerly incarcerated and reentering individuals into the process of program development as collaborators and co-creators can be a key to addressing the complex challenges that reentering individuals face in their return to their families and to employment in the community.

Implications and Recommendations

Interview participants in this study highlighted areas of need that, if addressed, could better serve individuals and their families during incarceration and in the reentry period. First, individuals, families, and communities would best be served if skills programs were informed by theory that recognizes the interconnectivity between individuals and systems, rather than separate, distinct entities. Second, prison skills programming that inspires personal development, self-improvement, and *bildung* in an individual could assist individuals with learning specific relationship and employment skills that are transferable and could be used for successful reintegration post-release. Lastly, creating programs that view reentering individuals, their families, and employers in the community as intrinsically connected to one another might have several benefits. Seeing that incarcerated individual, their families, and potential employers are connected is beneficial to all three as well as the larger community: if reentering individuals are released from prison properly prepared to reunite with family and enter into employment, they become an untapped source of desirable job candidates. With this, stigma for the individual and family members decreases, and in turn reentering individuals are hirable and better able to take financial care of themselves and contribute to their households. This could be supported and

enhanced if family members were offered similar relationship skills learning opportunities and provided with services such as therapy during incarceration and reentry.

The issue of access and availability came up in the participant interviews. Deborah shared that she knew the men had greater access to programs but none of the women in a small substance use disorder diversion unit did. Amy also shared that at her facility, there was a prison-wide newspaper that advertised more programs offerings to the men. This suggests that facilities may benefit from looking at men's and women's programming offered to see if there is equity and the ability for men and women to sign up for skills programming. Interview participants shared that many of their experiences with skills programming valued participation in the program over competency. Interview participant Michelle stated she wished for programming "that's really substantial" and to "have something be really meaningful" so it would have "real world significance" and "be a value when the person gets out of jail or prison." Skills programming and potential employment post-release would be enhanced by the removal of barriers to employment such as providing identification to individuals upon their release from prison and preparing them for current job search and hiring practices and technology (e.g., creating a resume and job search profile online; completing online job applications; pre-employment procedures).

Finally, changes in and losses of relationships during and after incarceration may alter an individual's role as a partner, parent or coparent, sibling or child. These changes to an individual's role within the family, custody agreements, or visitation schedules could affect an individual's desire to participate in skills programming or their eligibility to participate. Such relationship changes could also diminish the ability to apply the skills that are learned. Considering ambiguous loss as a barrier to skills learning could increase the supports available to

incarcerated and reentering individuals and their families, and removing this barrier could make room for skills learning.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study examined the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals and their perceptions about prison skills programming and how skills programming impacted their reentry into family life and employment. Future research should include attention to curriculum content, instruction, and timing of skills programming in the areas of employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management. The research should consider whether programs are evidence- based or informed by theory as well as look for measures of participant competency beyond mere attendance.

Research that looks at factors other than recidivism to investigate the outcomes of skills programs should be conducted to learn more about an individual's perceptions and satisfaction with different aspects of skills programming, measure an individuals' ability to find and maintain employment, and make discoveries about strengths and challenges within family relationships that might be addressed. Programs that offer interventions for incarcerated individuals and/or families such as issuing a state ID, providing specific job training, couples therapy, recreational opportunities, or play therapy for children should be investigated to determine the impacts of those interventions.

Finally, there is emerging research on ambiguous loss and incarceration, but its focus is on the "survivors" of incarceration: partners and children who still reside in the community. Inquiry into the effects of ambiguous loss on incarcerated individuals may provide insight into challenges faced by those experiencing grief due to the changes and losses during and sometimes due to incarceration.

Limitations

The method required a pivot when the one hundred responses that initially were expected from the RES did not materialize, nor were the anticipated 4-6 in-depth interviews generated. A small percentage of return of RES responses may have been due to factors such as perceived stigma and concerns about privacy among reentering individuals or perhaps related to the intensity of privacy associated with the Covid pandemic.

While the pivot to reliance on interviews proved productive beyond expectation, there were several environmental factors and extenuating circumstances that created limitations for the study. This dissertation study may have been limited by a small sample size (n= 10 for RES and n=12 for the interviews), and therefore a lack of generalizability. With a phenomenological approach, a large interview sample size was not intended.

The interview sample was also concentrated in Massachusetts and New Hampshire with 9 of 12 participants residing and formerly incarcerated in those two states. This was likely related to researcher connection to the area and research taking place in New Hampshire and the lower than expected RES responses.

Information about the RES was distributed and research was conducted during the Covid pandemic. The effects of the pandemic necessitated lockdowns, heightened health concerns, and changes in the daily routines for most people (e.g., employment and children's schooling). It also heightened fears and anxieties surrounding becoming ill, being unable to live normally, being able to work and take care of responsibilities, and many unknowns. This may have been a contributing factor to the number of RES responses being lower than expected.

Due to methods that required participants to answer the RES survey, respond to a personal invitation, or respond to social media advertisement, the RES sample and the interview

participant sample might be limited by self-selection bias. Although the data come from individuals who chose to participate and share their rich experiences and insights, this may have limited participants who did not have experiences with skills programming due to their own choice, the lack of transformative experiences during incarceration, or because of issues with access and availability.

All of the interview participants were familiar with prison life skills programming: all twelve reported involvement with skills programming in at least one of the five focus areas of employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management. In terms of employment, all twelve interview participants were either employed full time (10 interview participants) or were students (2 participants), versus being unemployed or reporting challenges with finding and/or maintaining employment. Finally, since the PBQ was targeted at gathering data about literacy rather than specifically at life skills programming, the archival data used for comparison was limited to employment skills programming.

Final Reflections

Thinking about the design, research, and analysis that were used to complete this dissertation, I am hopeful that other researchers and leaders in prison and reentry work will also view incarcerated and reentering individuals as collaborators and co-investigators in their research, as it was a critical part of the work presented here. The learnings about the importance of attention to intersectionality and of matching a particular qualitative research design with the population and desired outcome surpassed my expectations. I hope to bring both forth through presentations and publications to share with scholars in the field and professionals in practice as well as in direct, daily application in my professional work.

In an ironic and sometimes painful way, I experienced one of the variables I studied as I experienced major life changes and my own transformative process throughout the program. I began the program as a working mother of three children, who were 16, 13, and 11 years old. Soon after classes began, I met a man and we decided to marry in 2019, combine our four children, and make a major move to New Hampshire. The Covid pandemic year of 2020 affected me and my family, as it brought both tragedy and joy. I lost my mother to Covid in May of 2020; it also brought us joy--our daughter Josselin May, who was born in October 2020. Over my doctoral years, I have gained even greater appreciation for the close relationships that define me, support me, and help me to grow as a person.

The process has been challenging, but despite many significant events, I persevered through my research and dissertation writing. My critical thinking skills, research skills, and writing skills have grown and improved, and I am hopeful that these skills will prove to be helpful in opportunities I will have to share my work. I hope to be able to share my research and experiences with writing this dissertation with others in my field, in related fields, and with community stakeholders.

Throughout these experiences, my desire to continue to advocate for those who have experienced incarceration and are reentering into the community is unwavering and has grown even stronger, and I am hopeful that I will find meaningful ways to share the expertise gained through the dissertation process to support change in individuals and create systemic change.

In the past year, I was offered an opportunity to shift from working with incarcerated individuals to working in the community with reentering individuals as a member of a treatment court team. Treatment courts serve veterans, people with mental health diagnoses, and people with substance use disorders who are high risk and high need. Individuals who choose to take

part in such programs in place of a prison sentence are provided with therapy, case management, and a high level of accountability through the court system. They are also able to maintain contact with their loved ones and, if able, to seek employment.[3]

My academic work, and specifically this dissertation, had much to do with my choice to take this position and greatly informs how I navigate both my position and approach to the work with my clients. Knowledge of the existing scholarship and a strong foundation of theory have assisted with many plans and decisions that I have made in my position at my work. In addition, the voices of my participants, who gave their time and insights so generously, keep resonating and reminding me to keep my awareness open to the reality of the breadth and depth of simultaneous challenges each individual uniquely faces during the reentry process.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods dissertation study focused on the ways that prison skills programs were perceived by individuals who had direct experiences with skills programs in five areas of focus: employment readiness, reentry skills, parenting and family relationships, life skills, and anger management, and the ways in which skills programming influenced their experiences with family and employment during reentry. Relying on the rich, lived experiences of the interview participants, RES data, and PBQ archival data, the eight study findings showed prison life skills programming may provide opportunities for individuals to make personal changes that involve self-improvement and gain self-efficacy or *bildung* though skills development. This may facilitate success in the reentry process and reintegration into family and employment. Skills

[3] More information about national treatment courts can be found at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals website (nadcp.org) or the National Drug Court Institute website (ndci.org).

learning, personal development, and positive experiences in family relationships and employment could lessen the likelihood of recidivism.

The findings of this study expand the scholarship about prison programming and reentry by highlighting the concept that programming that is available and accessible to individuals while they are incarcerated is a potential route to transformative learning. Experiences with direct and ambiguous loss during incarceration, difficulty with employment post-release, and a lack of availability of supportive programming for partners and children in their communities were also revealed in the findings.

The interview participants' identification of longing for opportunity to build skills and competencies, explore career options, and experience successes was congruent with a final finding that crossed all guiding research questions for the study. This finding identified social-emotional development, practical skills, and prescribed training programming as "must have" components of an ideal prison skills program. This included opportunities and to make improvements in their personal development, family relationships, and employment along with complementary supports for family members would fulfill interview participant's suggestions for more skills and opportunities. Further information that might come from those with close firsthand experiences with skills programming and reentry would pinpoint other wants and needs for reentry from those who have experienced the transition from incarceration to the community.

Reentering individuals, their families, employers, and communities will benefit if the gaps could be filled between the current practices of prison skills programming and real reentry needs and expectations. This would support a less siloed approach to prison skills programs and their expected applications for family relationships and employment during reentry. Asking those who experienced prison skills programs firsthand about their experiences provided valuable

insights that can inform design, curriculum, and instruction in prison program development and implementation. Listening to the voices of individuals with real, lived experiences and including them as expert collaborators addresses the true complexities of reentry by gaining understanding about what types of learning and support is necessary for reentering individuals and will best benefit individuals, their families, and their communities.

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Appendix A: Online Survey Research Informed Consent and Survey

Dear Participant:

This survey asks questions about your experiences with prison programs as a formerly incarcerated individual for a research study that involves learning from prison skills programs. We want to gain understanding of you and your perceptions if and how these programs influenced your reentry process. Data from the survey will be used for scholarly research to fulfill a Ph.D. requirement at Lesley University's Graduate School of Education.

This survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers or direct benefits or drawbacks to taking this survey. Participation in this survey is voluntary and you can stop taking the survey at any point in the process.

Your responses will be kept confidential, in the Qualtrics analysis, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

There is a Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University. This committee will respond to any reported complaints or problems concerning any research project. You can contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to keep a copy of this consent page for your records.

This survey may ask you if you would like to participate in a follow up interview. Should you choose to participate in a follow up interview, you will be asked to provide your contact information.

Any questions regarding this survey can be directed to me via email at jsmith74@lesley.edu and/or my Lesley University research supervisor Dr. Janel Lucas at JLucas@lesley.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. Your responses are important!

Participation in this online survey by clicking "next" will constitute consent.

Yes, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that data from this survey will be used for scholarly research on prison life skills learning. I confirm that I am between the ages of 18-76 and have not previously taken this survey. I hereby agree to participate in this survey.

[Next]

Section 1 Demographics

1. What is your age?
   18-24 25-35 35-45 45-55 55+
2. Gender: How do you identify?
   - Female
   - Male

- Non-Binary
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Prefer to self-describe (fill in)

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

    - Pre-primary or no schooling
    - Grades 1-6
    - Grades 7-9
    - High School Diploma
    - GED
    - Pre-associate education. Attended trade school, college, or university; no certificate or degree received
    - A certificate from a college or trade school for completion of a program (e.g., Home Health Aide, Landscaping, Plumbing/ HVAC)
    - Associate degree
    - Bachelor's degree (BA, AB, BS)
    - Master's degree (MA, MS, MSW, MBA)
    - Professional degree (MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
    - Doctorate degree (PhD, EdD)
    - Foreign degree

4. What was the area of study, emphasis or major for your highest level of education? Fill in response

5. Are you currently studying for any kind of formal degree or certificate?
    - Yes
    - No

6. What type of degree or certificate are you currently studying for?
    - High School Diploma or GED
    - Pre-associate education. Attended trade school, college, or university; no certificate or degree received
    - A certificate from a college or vocational/trade school for completion of a program prior to the associate/ bachelor's degree
    - Associate degree

- Bachelor's degree (BA, AB, BS)
- Master's degree (MA, MS, MSW, MBA)
- Professional degree (MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- Doctorate degree (PhD, EdD)
- Foreign degree

7. When were you incarcerated most recently?
   Month

   Fill in response

   Year

   Fill in response

8. What was the length of sentence?
   0-1 year 1-3 years 3-5 years 5+ years

9. Where were you incarcerated?
   - Jail
   - Detention Center
   - Prison
   - Transitional or Pre-release Facility
   - House Arrest/ Electronic Monitoring

10. In what county and state was this last incarceration?
    Fill in response

11. How many times have you been incarcerated?
    a. Pretrial
    0-2 times 3-5 times 5+ times

    b. Sentenced
    0-2 times 3-5 times 5+ times

12.

a. Who do you live with?
    - alone
    - with my parents
    - with other relatives
    - with roommates
    - with a romantic partner or spouse

b. Where do you live?
    - A single family home
    - A multi family home
    - An apartment building
    - A rooming house or hotel
    - A shelter
    - I am homeless

13.

a. Were you born in the United States?
    - Yes
    - No

b. In what country were you born? Fill in Response

c. How old were you when you came to the United States?
   What year did you come to the United States?

d. Are you Hispanic or Latino?
    Yes

    No

e. Which of the following groups describes your Hispanic or Latino origin? Choose one or more:
    - Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano
    - Puerto Rican or Puerto Rican American
    - Cuban or Cuban American
    - Central or South American

- Other Hispanic or Latino background

f. Which best describes you? Choose one or more:
   - White
   - Black or African American
   - Asian
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

g. What is your first/ native language? Fill In

14. Which of the following best describes your current marital status?
    - Never married
    - Married
    - Legally Separated or divorced
    - Widowed

15.
    a. How many biological children do you have? Fill in response
    b. How many biological children do you live with? Fill in response
    c. How many stepchildren do you have? Fill in response
    d. How many stepchildren do you live with? Fill in response

16.
    a. How old is your youngest child? Fill in response
    b. How old is your oldest child? Fill in response

Section 2 Learning

17. During your last period of incarceration, did you take any classes or have a tutor in a high school equivalency program or adult high school program?
    - Yes, I participated and completed high school or GED
    - Yes, I participated but did not complete high school or GED
    - No, I did not have a High School diploma or GED but I did not participate
    - No, I already had a High School diploma or GED

18. How much do the following sentences describe you?

a. When I hear or read about new ideas, I try to relate them to real life situations in which they might apply
    - Not at all
    - Very little
    - Somewhat
    - This describes me perfectly

b. I like learning new things
    - Not at all
    - Very little
    - Somewhat
    - This describes me perfectly

c. When I come across something new, I try to relate it to what I already know
    - Not at all
    - Very little
    - Somewhat
    - This describes me perfectly

d. My experience with incarceration has motivated me to learn
    - Not at all
    - Very little
    - Somewhat
    - This describes me perfectly

e. I think I have changed by learning new things
    - Not at all
    - Very little
    - Somewhat
    - This describes me perfectly

Section 3 Program Experiences

19.

a. During your last incarceration, did you attend employment readiness classes (e.g., how to find a job or interviewing skills)?

- Yes
- No
  - It was not offered at the facility I was incarcerated
  - I was not interested in this program
    - Why? Fill in
  - There was a wait list for this program
  - I was not eligible to participate
    - Why? Fill in

b. During you last incarceration, how many hours did you attend employment readiness during the time you were incarcerated?

1-4 5-9 10-15 16-20 20+

c. What was your main reason for attending an employment readiness class?

- Self improvement
- Family related reasons
- To increase possibilities of finding a job when released
- To increase possibilities that I could find work that would be better for me and those I support
- I was required to participate
- Other, please state why:

d. How useful was the employment readiness program for your reentry?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful

Please state how or why this program was useful or not useful in your reentry:

Please state what you needed to make it useful:

20.

a. During your last incarceration, did you attend reentry classes (e.g., securing housing and health/ medical insurance or accessing transitional supports like SNAP or transportation passes)?

- Yes
- No
    - It was not offered at the facility I was incarcerated
    - I was not interested in this program
        - Why? Fill in
    - There was a wait list for this program
    - I was not eligible to participate
        - Why? Fill in

b. During you last incarceration, how many hours did you attend reentry classes?

1-4 5-9 10-15 16-20 20+

c. What was your main reason for attending a reentry class?

- Self improvement
- Family related reasons
- To increase my chances of staying out of prison
- To increase possibilities that I could find housing
- To increase possibilities that I could access other supports
- I was required to participate
- Other, please state:

d. How useful was the reentry program for your reentry?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful

Please state how or why this program was useful or not useful in your reentry:

Please state what you needed to make it useful:

21.

a. During your last incarceration, did you attend classes in parenting or child rearing skills?

- Yes
- No
    - It was not offered at the facility I was incarcerated
    - I was not interested in this program
        - Why? Fill in
    - There was a wait list for this program
    - I was not eligible to participate
        - Why? Fill in

b. During your last incarceration, how many hours did you attend classes in parenting or child rearing skills?

1-4 5-9 10-15 16-20 20+

c. What was your main reason for attending this class?

- Self improvement
- To improve my relationships with my child/ children
- To improve my parenting skills
- To improve co-parenting with my child/ children's other parent(s)
- I was required to participate
- Other, please state:

d. How useful has a parenting or child rearing program been on your reentry?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful

Please state how or why this program was useful or not useful in your reentry:

Please state what you needed to make it useful:

22.

a. During your last incarceration, did you attend classes in life skills (e.g., personal finance, problem solving, decision making, goal setting)?

- Yes
- No
    - It was not offered at the facility I was incarcerated
    - I was not interested in this program
        - Why? Fill in
    - There was a wait list for this program
    - I was not eligible to participate
        - Why? Fill in

b. During your last incarceration, how many hours did you attend classes in life skills?

1-4 5-9 10-15 16-20 20+

c. What was your main reason for attending this class?

- Self improvement
- Family related reasons
- To learn to budget money better
- To learn how to live more independently
- To learn how to set and meet goals
- I was required to participate
- Other, please state:

d. How useful has this program been on your reentry?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful

Please state how or why this program was useful or not useful in your reentry:

Please state what you needed to make it useful:

23.

a. During your last incarceration, did you attend classes in anger management (conflict resolution, alternatives to violence)?
    - Yes
    - No
        - It was not offered at the facility I was incarcerated
        - I was not interested in this program
            - Why? Fill in
        - There was a wait list for this program
        - I was not eligible to participate
            - Why? Fill in

b. During your last incarceration, how many hours did you attend anger management classes?

    1-4 5-9 10-15 16-20 20+

c. What was you reason for attending this class?
    - Self improvement
    - To work on anger issues
    - To improve my close relationships (with a partner, children, other family)
    - To improve my attitude at work
    - To feel a sense of peace or calm
    - I was required to participate
    - Other

d. How useful has this program been on your reentry?
    - Extremely useful
    - Very useful
    - Somewhat useful
    - Not useful

Please state how or why this program was useful or not useful in your reentry:

Please state what you needed to make it useful:

Section 4 Reentry—Employment

24.

a. Which ONE of the statements best describes your current situation? If more than one statement applies to you, please indicate the statement that best describes how you see yourself:

- Full time employed
- Part time employed
- Unemployed
- Pupil, Student
- Apprentice, Internship
- In retirement or early retirement
- Permanently Disabled
- Military or community service
- Fulfilling domestic tasks or looking after children/ family
- Other

b. Have you experienced any of the following:

- Job Loss
- Frequent job changes
- Difficulty paying bills with your current pay
- Difficulty in getting hired

Fill in: Why do you think this is happening?

c. What type of work do you do?

- Management
- Professional
- Technician
- Clerical Support
- Sales and Service
- Skilled Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery Work
- Craft and Related Trades
- Plant / Machine Operation and Assembly
- Labor/ Cleaning/ Food Services

25.

a. Which ONE of the statements best describes the current situation of your spouse or partner?

- Full time employed
- Part time employed
- Unemployed
- Pupil, Student
- Apprentice, Internship

- In retirement or early retirement
- Permanently Disabled
- Military or community service
- Fulfilling domestic tasks or looking after children/ family
- Other

b. Has your partner/ spouse experienced any of the following:
    - Job Loss
    - Frequent job changes
    - Difficulty paying bills with your current pay
    - Difficulty in getting hired

    Fill in: Why do you think this is happening?

c. What type of work does your partner/ spouse do?
    - Management
    - Professional
    - Technician
    - Clerical Support
    - Sales and Service
    - Skilled Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery Work
    - Craft and Related Trades
    - Plant / Machine Operation and Assembly
    - Labor/ Cleaning/ Food Services

Section 5—Reentry, Family

26. How would you describe your relationship with your spouse/ partner?

- N/A
- Very difficult/ Unhealthy
- Somewhat difficult
- Neutral
- Somewhat healthy
- Very successful/ Healthy

Fill in – Do you think there are any adjustments your spouse/partner has had to make during your incarceration and reentry? What are they?

27. How would you describe your relationship(s) with your child/ children?

    - N/A
    - Very difficult/ Unhealthy
    - Somewhat difficult
    - Neutral
    - Somewhat healthy
    - Very successful/ Healthy

    Fill in – Do you think there are any adjustments that your child/ children have had to make during your incarceration and reentry? What are they?

28. What reentry support (if any) do you receive in your community (e.g., classes, counseling, coaching, or support groups)? Fill in if none choose "None"

29. Has your spouse/ partner or children received any community support during or after your incarceration (e.g., classes, counseling, coaching, or support groups)? Fill in, if none choose "None" if you don't know, choose "I don't know"

30. Would you like to participate in the interview phase of this study? I plan to interview a few individuals and expect the interviews will last approximately 1 hour. I will conduct them personally by phone and schedule at your convenience. All interview information will be held as confidential on my password protected computer, only accessible to me. If you are willing to do an interview, please click the email link and send me your name, phone number, and good times to reach you, and I will contact you privately to set up a time for the interview.

    [Link]

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interviewer to Participant:

Thank you for taking the time to share information about your experiences with prison skills programs. This interview will last about 60 minutes.

I have a list of questions to guide this interview, please know you may refuse to answer any question. You may also request to stop our interview at any time to ask questions or to end the interview. This interview is entirely voluntary, and the interview will serve as one source of data for my dissertation. I will record this interview to create a written transcript of our conversation for analysis. I will also take notes during the interview which will be transferred to electronic format immediately after we speak and shred the notes. I will hold the information that you provide in this interview as confidential, and all data analyses will remain anonymous in the results in my dissertation. All notes and recordings from this interview will be kept on a password protected electronic device.

Do you have any questions about what I just described?

Any questions that may come up after this interview can be directed to me via email at jsmith74@lesley.edu and/or to my Lesley University research supervisor Dr. Janel Lucas at JLucas@lesley.edu.

There is a Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University. This committee will respond to any reported complaints or problems concerning any research project. You can contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to keep a copy of the consent page for your records.

[Signed consent to be transmitted via email or MMS text prior to beginning the phone interview]

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me more about why you did/ did not participate in skills programs during your last incarceration?
    a. What were your learning and classroom experiences like before your incarceration?
    b. Have you had any learning and classroom experiences since your release? Can you tell me about them?

2. How did you become aware of any skills programs that were offered during your last incarceration?

3. What do you think other inmates thought about individuals who participated in programs during the time of your incarceration? Why do you think that was the case?

4. Can you describe your reentry experience?
    a. What are the things that you think a person needs to prepare for reentry?
    b. Was there anything you wish you had learned more about that you think would have helped you with your reentry?

5. What were your family relationships like before you were incarcerated? What were these relationships like after you were released?
    a. Were there elements of your skills programming experience that started or helped the process of change in your family relationships?
    b. Were there elements of your skills programming experience that helped you to reconnect with your family?

6. What was your employment history before you were incarcerated? What has employment been like since your release?
    a. Were there elements of your skills programming experience that started or helped the process of changing any of your ideas or feelings about employment?
    b. Were there elements of your skills programming experience that helped you to gain or maintain employment?

7. If you were asked to design a skills program for a jail or prison, what would your main goal of the program be? What would the three most important topics be? Why did you choose those?

Appendix C: Interview Informed Consent Letter

Dear Participant:

You have expressed interest in participating in the interview phase of my research study. This study is collecting and analyzing information about the experiences that reentering individuals had with prison programs during their incarceration.

This interview should last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. There are no direct benefits or drawbacks to participating in the interview. Participation in this interview is voluntary. You are free to ask me questions at any time or to stop the interview if you choose to do so.

Your interview will be recorded so I can focus on you and your responses. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in password coded secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

There is a Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University. This committee will respond to any reported complaints or problems concerning any research project. You can contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to keep a copy of this consent page for your records.

Any questions regarding this interview can be directed to me via email at jsmith74@lesley.edu and/or my Lesley University research supervisor Dr. Janel Lucas at JLucas@lesley.edu.

As part of this research, you are invited to receive a final report of your interview to check for accuracy and comment on the analysis. This report will be sent via a provided email address

____ Yes, I would like to receive an interview report at:

_____

____ No, I would not like to receive an interview report.

Signing below indicates that you reviewed the information above and consent to participate and acknowledge that the data from this interview will be used in my research on life skills learning in prison programs

___Yes, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that data from this interview will be used for scholarly research on prison skills programs. I hereby agree to take part in the interview phase of this study.

_____ _____

_____

Printed Name Signature Date

Appendix D: IRB Addendum Approval Letter

29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA
02138

Tel 617 349 8234
Fax 617 349 8190
irb@lesley.edu

Institutional Review

04.01.2022

To: Jennifer Tatten

From: Ulas Kaplan and Jason Frydman, Co-Chairs, Lesley IRB

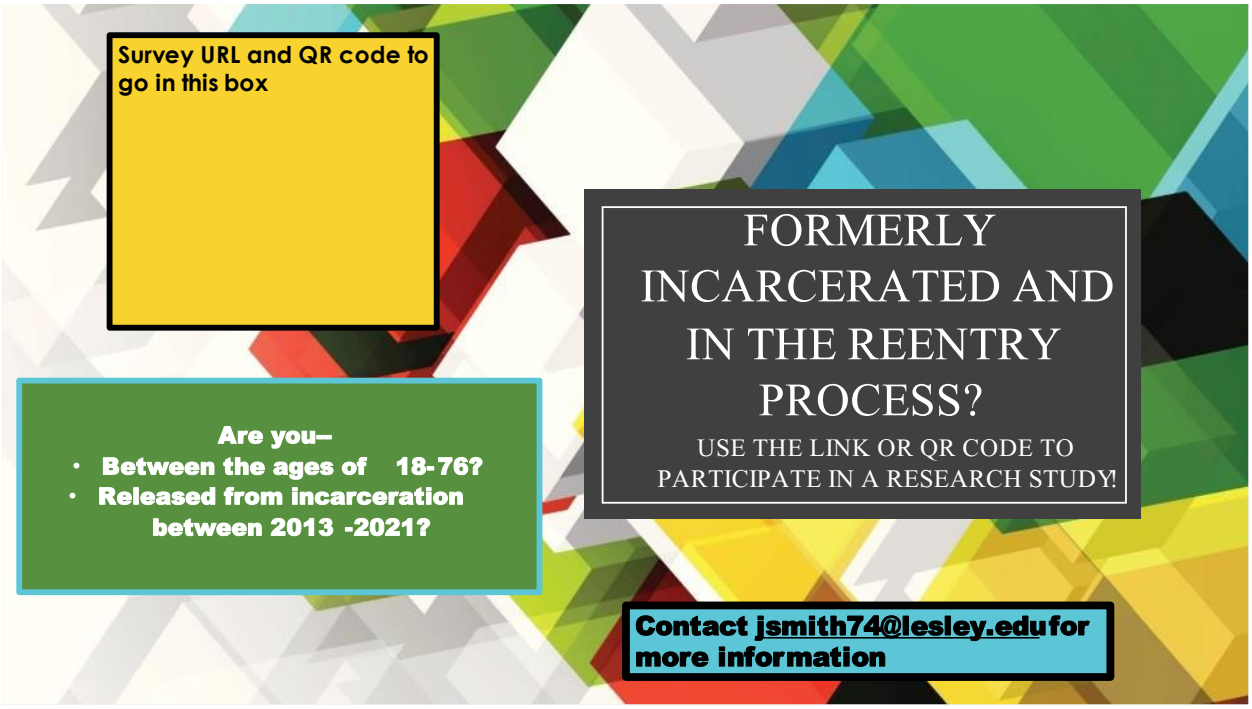
RE: Addendum **of IRB Number: 21/22-011**

This memo is written on behalf of the Lesley University IRB to inform you that your request for an addendum of project **IRB Number: 21/22-011**

has been approved.

Date of IRB Approval: 04.01.2022

Appendix E: Social Media Recruitment Information



Appendix F: Personal Communication

Pawlowski, Emily <epawlowski@air.org> Tue, May 18, 2021 at 4:03 PM

To: Jennifer Tatten <jennifertatten@gmail.com>

Cc: "Xie, Holly" <holly.xie@ed.gov>

Hi Jennifer,

Glad to hear the materials were useful. I have responded to your questions below. Let me know if you have any follow-up questions.

Best,

Emily

From: Jennifer Tatten <jennifertatten@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, May 17, 2021 9:37 AM

To: Pawlowski, Emily <epawlowski@air.org>

Cc: Xie, Holly <holly.xie@ed.gov>

Subject: Follow-up questions

External email alert: Be wary of links & attachments.

Hi Emily,

I spent the end of last week and the weekend looking through the links you sent--- Thank you again! The technical manual is full of information and the conceptual framework is extremely helpful in connecting the dots. I am so interested in many of the references used in the framework and plan to dive into those this week. Here are some thoughts and questions-- I would love your feedback:

1. Do you have thoughts on the potential successes or challenges in accessing individuals who were formerly incarcerated? I am considering using social media as a resource in accessing this group and administering the survey (via support groups for reentry, probationers, parolees, etc.). Do you know if any researchers involved with PIAAC followed the incarcerated (or formerly incarcerated) study participants and if so, how did this go?

None of the researchers involved with PIAAC have followed the incarcerated study participants, and there is no intention to do so at this point. So, unfortunately, we do not have much expertise in this area and do not really have any particular recommendations on how you may best reach this population.

However, in one of our previous research conferences we had a speaker named Stanley Andrisse, Assistant Professor at Howard University College of Medicine and Executive Director of "From Prison Cells to PhD." He has done a lot of work with the formerly incarcerated and might be a good person to reach out to, his email is fromprisoncellstophd@gmail.com or Stanley@prisontopro.org.

2. I asked you and Holly about using sections or individual questions from PBQ, but I see tremendous value in using all sections (with the skip logic/ routing). Since subjects would self-select and likely do the questionnaire online, I would omit the interviewer qualifying questions and start with A_Q01a. It then seems that I could adapt questions for reentering individuals (so instead of the question pertaining to a present incarceration, it would be the same question about the previous incarceration). Do you foresee any challenges that might come up with these adaptations?

One challenge is that the updated wording of the questions would not have been tested, so you will need to be careful to make sure the question is being interpreted by

respondents the way you intend it to be. Also, depending on the length of time the respondent has been outside of prison, if their previous incarceration was too far in the past, some of their responses may not be reliable. This could especially be the case with the more detailed questions, like use of specific skills in a prison job.

3. While a bit daunted by the highly technical nature of PIAAC, I'm excited to compare my results with the PBQ—Are you able to think of any ways I might get assistance in getting this research analyzed? My school leans heavily toward qualitative analysis so unfortunately I don't have university access to quantitative software for analysis.

You may be able to get the results you are interested in using the NCES PIAAC International Data Explorer (IDE). This is a user-friendly online tool that allows one to conduct basic statistical analyses and produce tables and charts, accounting for the complex design of PIAAC without requiring any statistical software or advanced statistical knowledge. Check out this IDE training video for more information on how to use the IDE. We would also be happy to walk you through the use of the IDE if the tool appears to be of interest to you. If you are looking for some analyses that are more advanced or cannot be done in IDE, we may be able to assist if the analysis is not too extensive.

With much appreciation!

Jennifer